

UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER

**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**Dancing in the Cosmos: Towards Liberating
Theological Models for Children's Spirituality and
Sexuality**

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Abstract

This thesis is born out of my own experiences of abuse and of the liberating energy of the divine within this process. There was a struggle and I did not have a language to name my own pain. Both society and the church left me voiceless in relation to my particular experiences but I found a voice in art. From these beginnings I developed a passionate desire to find a new model for our female children, one of empowered embodiment and radical connection, as I realise I was not alone in my experience of voiceless vulnerability. It is my hope that the model I develop will make the girl child less vulnerable to patriarchal systems while not losing the strength of mutual vulnerability of which theologians speak.

Therefore, I examine what Christianity offers the girl child in the areas of sexuality and spirituality and then move on to ask if the interdisciplinary mingling of the new cosmology with feminist theology, which gave me my voice, offers bigger, bolder and more creative spaces in which to grow empowered and passionate girl children.

The new cosmology builds on the embodied opportunities that feminist and radical sexual theology open up for us by exploring the place of the body in the widest possible sphere that of the cosmos itself while not losing the intimacy of that task. This can be demonstrated in the work of Rupert Sheldrake and Judy Cannato who explore the resonance of energetic fields yet link this with human reality. Further, the work of Peter Levine and Maggie Klein, Linda Hartley and Luce Irigaray in the area of breath demonstrates the scientific and also theological significance of this fully embodied activity.

Part of my work is a set of painted panels illustrating our Universe story from the Big Bang to the creation of our planet. These are the backbone of the art work from which I develop a series of other art works which demonstrate my interpretation of the interplay between the embodied narrative of the internal world of the feminine and that of the external environment of theology, society, religion and culture. My art work shows the artist as present as it weaves its way in the written narrative of my thesis.

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Megan Clay, declare that the thesis entitled: **‘Dancing in the Cosmos: Towards Liberating Theological Models for Children’s Spirituality and Sexuality’** and the work presented in the thesis are both my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
- where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
- where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by myself and what I have contributed myself;
- none of this work has been published before submission.

Signed:

Date:

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Introduction

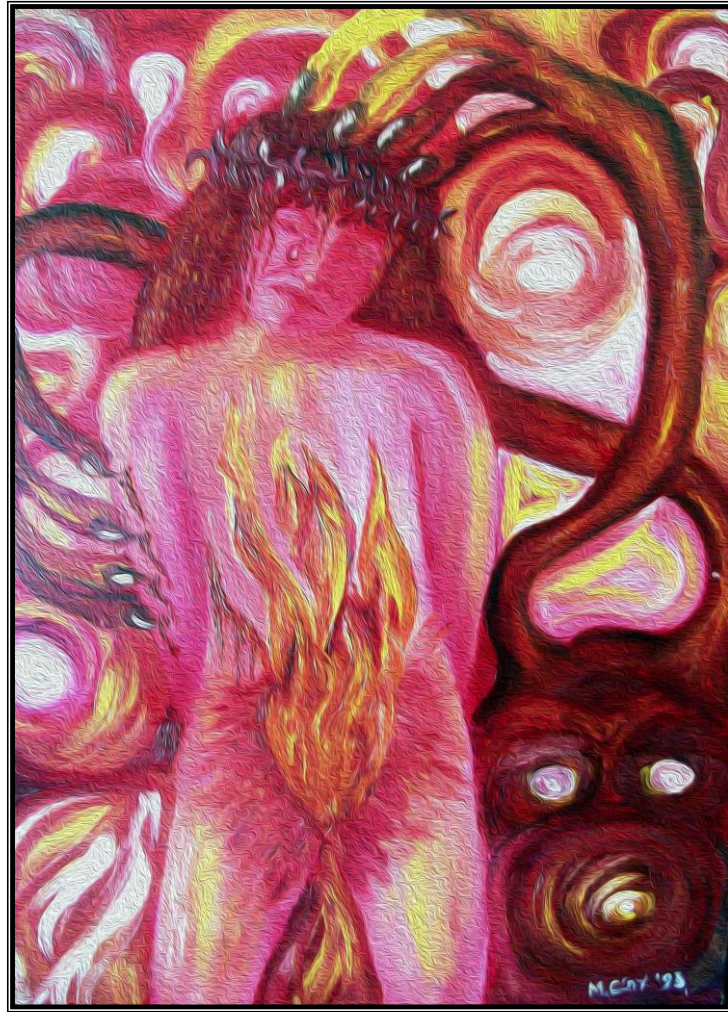


Figure 1 'The Secret', oil painting Megan Clay 1993

This image depicts the paradoxical entanglement associated with pleasure and pain, the explosive orgasm mixed with the unwelcome grasping and taking hold of my child body. This was taken to another level for me within the unequal power relationship between the adult and child. Unequal power relations operate across a spectrum of experience for the child. These experiences manifest in varying degrees within the adult world in what has been historically/ theologically thought and projected onto the child. This painting illustrates the materialisation of what is taken into the body through word and action demonstrating how those projections are felt by the subject. It is in this space that the experiential becomes both personal and political. Feminist liberation theologies begin with experience and the journey, to paraphrase what Nelle Morton says, is that liberation begins with being heard into speech and it is this that begins the journey home, home to our-selves, our bodies. This image is called the secret because my body was a place full of painful emotional and sensual secrets until I opened the door to my consciousness and the full acknowledgement of my experience. I discovered that even within an abusive sexual act which was not ok for me I nevertheless experienced pleasure so, the complexity of entanglement begins. It was much later when I reached maturity, as a woman I first realised that my sexuality/sensuality/spirituality were the seat of my desire and power. Most importantly I realised that these intimate connections were to have been for me to first discover, in relationship to myself and later within a mutually reciprocal relationship with another. The imparting of this knowledge of those intimate connections to our girl child needs to be seriously considered as a crucial part of a nurturing educative praxis that begins with her body, her incarnate self. This image is the third image I painted in my unfolding process as part of a series of six paintings that were born out of therapeutic counselling.

My Story

This thesis like all feminist theology grows out of personal experience, reflection and engagement with theological traditions, methods and revelation.¹ My work is based in my experiences as a female child and woman within patriarchy, the culture I was brought up in and now live within. For a long time I was a voiceless woman and always a voiceless child. I was a woman who was fighting some sort of invisible enemy that was trying to contain me within a foreign language, a foreign land and alien imagery.² I was a woman who was buried under the suffocating expectation that as a woman I would provide nurture and shelter for anyone who thought they could convince me that they needed it and in this my own need was lost. I had begun to realise that my whole life experience was built around how I was groomed as a child, with a childhood that was full of dark corners, cubby holes and secrets. This was the beginning of entrapped patterns and cycles that laid the early foundations of my education as female. In retrospect I realise that my life experience was an educational reality and that education and gaining knowledge are not just obtained through going to school or taking a series of exams or degrees, although they are a crucial part of the learning process. Dori Ginenko Baker speaks from a feminist theological perspective about what is useable from past experience in our weaving of stories of experience into the on-going narrative. By doing this we can venture into the realm of trying to do things differently by learning from those past experiences..

Baker tells us the story of how Mrs Flowers a teacher from the black community, where the young feminist poet Maya Angelou was growing up, explained to Maya the value of lived experience as a field of learning. She said that, 'some people unable to go to school were more educated and even more intelligent than college professors...listen carefully to what country people say about mothers' wit...in those homely sayings was couched the collective

¹ For example, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1983); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Lisa Isherwood, *Liberating Christ: Exploring The Christologies Of Contemporary Liberation Movements* (Cleveland Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1999); Lisa Isherwood, *Erotic Celibacy: Queering Heteropatriarchy* (London, New York: T&T Clark, 2006); Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1998).

² I speak about a foreign language because the Word of God restricts the '*jouissance*' of women by a limited definition of who they are within the phallogocentric language of patriarchy. My suggestion of a foreign land indicates the space we are allocated as women within male territory. We are so used to seeing male images in relation to the divine and the same with theological language. The Word and the territory are allocated to the male and we are allocated a tight space in which to be woman. Luce Irigaray relates an experience of making a discovery in a museum in Italy where she saw a wooden statue of what resembled Mary and Jesus. On a closer look she realised that the child is female. She expresses a feeling of elation on this discovery and it filled her with hope. Luce Irigaray, *Je, tu, nous: Towards a Culture of Difference* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp.23-28.

wisdom of generations'.³ The passing down of knowledge and recounting one's personal experience within that process can add to the wisdom of generations and it is this understanding when added to academic principles of learning has unquestionable value for transferring knowledge. Feminist liberation theologies engage with the experiential and help with the process of seeking a relational way of being.

My own story continues with being so physically and emotionally full that something had to give. It was the feelings of pressure and anger at my entrapment and my embodied attempts at resistance to those early experiences that led to a breakdown and a breakthrough at the age of thirty three. During this time my body was extremely sensitive to everything within my environment. I was in pain throughout my body, inside and out and the only way I could express this pain was through scribbled drawings with colour. I found myself drawing what I was afraid of, childhood memories of abuse and things in my immediate environment that crowded me and pushed me into myself in a claustrophobic way. Images would just appear in my head, I could feel the physicality which was made manifest through bodily sensations, as the images rose up from trapped spaces within my body and then I would get these images out on paper. I found relief and in time, transformation through being able to express myself in this way. I realised I had found a language other than the words of patriarchy. This was the language of art that spoke from my innermost bodily experiences and as my art evolved it unfolded me in stages, these expressed images became my liturgy and prayer.

Having been involved in Church as a child I found myself consciously thinking about the God of Jesus and felt drawn again to the doors of the Church, I wondered if returning would give me a framework in which to understand what I was feeling. Surely the incarnational proclamation that 'The Word' became flesh and dwelt amongst us...⁴ as Christ's incarnation could help me understand my own being. However as we know, the Church's teaching has come to declare Jesus as the only divine incarnation that led to the sanitisation of the human Jesus into a metaphysical Christ. This metaphysical Christ has led to the divine incarnation becoming narrowly restricted to the image of man and to holding many prohibitions and exclusions.⁵ The Church Fathers⁶ understood Christ's flesh to be free from human desires in every way, yet somehow able to connect and have full access to knowledge of everything to do

³ Dori Grinenko Baker, *Girlfriend Theology: God Talk With Young Women* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2005), p.76.

⁴ John 1: 1.

⁵ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, (London, Boston: Faber and Faber, 1991), pp.83-102.

⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 23, 56.3. Timothy McDermott (ed.), *Summa Theologiae; A Concise Translation* (London: Methuen, 1991), p.223; Augustine, *Confessions*, Henry Chadwick, (trans.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), II. iii-iv, p.29.

with the human experience, including those of women. Divinity in the flesh became spirit filled and clinically sanitised body and the potential for a new way of embodied being was not realised.

This is the Church doctrine I engaged with at the age of thirty four, as a woman with experiences of my own abused humanity, after awakening to a realisation that my life was not as abundant as I had thought it was. It took me seven more years of process and unravelling my body narrative in the only language I knew which was image, to understand that I too was an incarnational subject of the divine. At the beginning of a very traditional doctrinal Christian journey, which began in a Catholic Community and ended up in an Anglican one, I already had what I can only describe as an embodied empowerment. However, after journeying onwards through another twelve years of the Anglican Church I experienced a sense of disempowerment after being open to others within this community. I was made to feel that I was not a suitably Christian woman due to my history of abuse and my status as a single parent to four children. My soiled nature could not fit the traditional Christian framework. This did not however stop the internal fire and passion that would drive me on my quest for love and justice in my own life as a woman and mother. This passion would take me on a mutually relational journey into the worlds of other marginalised people. The unravelling of my body narrative began with an internal knowledge of divine subjectivity⁷ that was to become a nurturing sustenance for my journey over quite difficult terrain and which now I realise will hold me through the rest of my life.

For a long time from thirty three to fifty two years old, the only language I knew was image. At this point in my life the images I had painted had only just started to gain any meaning that I could articulate to others. I always knew what they meant but the language for expressing this remained hidden and at times lost inside me. It was through this persistent activity of painting my feelings and emotions that a new language of the feminine gradually emerged. Because my images are my body narrative, finding a language to accompany and carry those images is important as part of a liberative praxis for me as a woman. This is a challenge to language which still, here in the 21st Century, does not express how it is to be a woman because it is phallogentric and is built around phallic signifiers⁸ which, by their very nature, exclude and disenfranchise women. So it is important for women to create their own language out of their embodied experience and creative practice. Feminist theology provides the theoretical framework for the language of the female body to evolve. This is why body

⁷ Elizabeth A Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Discourse* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002), p.69.

⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Margaret Waller (trans.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp.21-2.

theology, which, is a strand of feminist liberation theologies is so important to my work, as it is born out of the diverse contextual embodied experiences of women and challenges the theological meta-narrative of dualism on which patriarchy thrives. The language that is created by body narratives through image can create a moment of transcendence and transformation for both the female artist and the spectator. What I mean by transcendence is moving consciously sideways as opposed to beyond oneself. You are moving across from one state and place to another after an experience or an event. The process begins deep within and reshapes one's life and thinking - one transcends. I was on a journey of discovery, unpacking what had been written on my body and what my body had absorbed and believed about itself within a patriarchal society.



Figure 2 'In the Depths of the Divine', acrylic Megan Clay 1992.

This image reflects the depths of my own divine becoming which is forever unfolding. As I mention in the text below this was my first ever acrylic painting and it evolved out of reflections on my early spiritual experiences. Travelling inward and reflecting on those experiences took me to a place of finding God in me. This was a source of strength that held not only me but others in need whom I met on my unfolding spiritual journey.

The image, Figure 2 above, is called 'In the Depths of the Divine' and is representative of the beginning of that journey and demonstrates an expression of a personal experience of the divine within. I equated my experience at that time with 'The Magnificat', the Canticle of Mary.⁹ The story of Mary impacted on me in a positive way because of my own position as a

⁹ Luke 1: 46-55.

single mother and for the first time in my life I found meaning in my role of mothering. Her intercessory quality as mother gave me a purpose based in justice seeking and liberation which enlivened my own understanding of myself. It was only later, through my experience of Christian feminist theological discourses that my eyes were opened to the realisation that Mary was in fact a limited model. As the passively objectified perfect virginal other, which was how the Catholic Church saw her, she was in fact an unhelpful example for women and mothers to follow. My hope of understanding my own experience through this model of woman presented by the Catholic Church had fallen short and so I returned to my internalised imagining of divine subjectivity, from where I began to work out my position as woman and mother.

I was thirty eight and worshipping in an Anglican community when I was able to begin to make sense of that divine/human experience. This materialised through painting this first acrylic image 'In the Depths of the Divine', which I defined as God manifested in me, however I did not name it until 2004, twelve years later. It was then that I began to reflect on it and find the words for the language of my body narrative. 'In the Depths of the Divine' is an internalised image of divine subjectivity as woman being in the presence of God/Godself, offering her becoming as part of the web of life. This was my experience of entering into relationship as a co-creator,¹⁰ having been touched by the divine resonance of the cosmos, the Holy Spirit and I felt internally empowered.

This was my moment of meeting Christ, he was in me and I was in him and in that moment we were in the body of God and the body of God was in us. This understanding included the whole of the created order and the Cosmos itself. On reflection, I realise that the seeds were being sown for my understanding of and engagement with what has become known to me as quantum theology. This empowerment made me consciously aware of the interconnectedness of everything, I could feel this physically in my body, with people, with nature, when I looked into the sky day or night with my limited vision, I could feel the pull of being drawn into something bigger than myself. I became aware of hearing and seeing people differently and when they spoke the resonance of what they were saying had a powerful visceral effect on me. The feeling that my life would never be the same again was one of many such moments that I would experience. Going to Church and holding all this inside and wanting to relate to others was going to prove extremely difficult. It was so difficult to articulate this to others, in a way that was acceptable within that Church community. I was trying to relate my spiritual

¹⁰ Taking responsibility as a participator in a co-redemptive praxis in community with the body of Christ and being mindful of mutuality in relationship with others and the rest of creation on the earth. Carter Heyward, *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relationship* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press America, 1982), p.225.

experience in relation to my life. I so desperately wanted to be part of a community. I had experienced God and felt empowered and wanted to share my story. I empathised with Shug Avery who in conversation with Celie in Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple*, says, 'have you ever found God in Church? I never did. I just found a bunch of folks hoping for him to show. Any God I ever felt in church I brought in with me. And I think all the other folks did too. They come to Church to share God, not find God'.¹¹ My experience was that I had already found God in me so I was not going to the Church building to find God but to share my part of God with others who were part of that community.

However instead of being valued for my God part I felt trapped in a place that gave me no comfort. My Church community encouraged me to hand over to God/Christ all my sin and pain which they considered to be my childhood abuse and subsequent single parenthood. I was to hand my body over to a powerful male, the God of Christianity who would know what I needed. Although this handing over was meant to be on a spiritual level the feeling inside me was no different to that of being taken over by my abusers, as illustrated in Figure 1 'The Secret'. My own knowing and bodily/spiritual integrity was to be overcome by this powerful male God.

My journey took me to counselling as a result of which the six paintings 1, 3-7 in this section were brought to birth. Figure 1 'The Secret' which can be seen at the beginning of the introduction is the third image I painted in the series of my unfolding process. That particular image is significant, because, it is the wellspring of my first conscious sexual/spiritual experience. As the painting of my unfolding continued the experience of loss and woundedness circulated and coursed through my body and the healing process had begun. During this period of painting I felt I was being unfolded and revealed, this process began to show me what was written inside and on my body by my experiences from childhood through to becoming a woman. My journey had been one of sexual, physical, verbal and emotional violence. These six paintings expressed for me the divine within which manifested as energy enabling the process of healing to begin. As each painting revealed a different aspect of my experience I became energetically charged. This active energetic process of painting was tinged with a sense of urgency and drama which was also fused with my emotional world. Looking back on this process I realised something else about this time of painting and talking. It was that I was very physically active in other ways that seemed to me, on reflection, integral to this whole process. The physical action was part of the whole process which is still deeply imprinted within me. The image in Figure 3 below looks at choice and the anxiety of not knowing what choice to make because I am not informed enough to do so. My embodied

¹¹ Alice Walker, *The Colour Purple* (London: Orion Books, 2004), p.174.

knowing had been damaged through abuse leaving me insecure and uncertain even in the most basic choices. I felt as if I was rolling around in my own skin, yet not grounded in it which made choices seem impossible and frightening.



Figure 3 'Choice', oil 1993. Megan Clay.

This image demonstrates the feelings of anxiety over the decision making amidst multiple choices that are open to the subject. The swirls in the background illustrate vortexes of light as doorways of opportunity for the subject (me) to choose. This moment is full of anxiety as the subject shows through the clenching of her fist and the knotted feeling within which is reflected in the expression on her face.

During the months of counselling my art changed from the scribbled drawings and naive painting I had previously done to work with form and more vibrant colour. These came from the emotion and sensations I was feeling as they moved through my body during my counselling sessions. Figure 4 below shows the physicality of those feelings and how past experience had begun to loosen their hold on me as they rose to the surface of my

understanding from the depths my body. Each of the paintings in Figures 1, 3-7 show how my internal world is moving from one stage to another of understanding and knowledge.



Figure 4 'Rising', oil 1993. Megan Clay

This image shows a rising up out of the mire both internally and externally. As the somatised energy releases itself and reintegrates itself physiologically within the body. Understanding and knowledge are realised through this visceral process. Whilst I was painting this image that was exactly what it felt like, I was rising from some hidden place deep inside myself. With this feeling of intensity I would feel the pain rise upwards first to my heart where I would feel it physically palpitate continuing up and then spewing the pain out of my throat, I am left feeling cleansed, lighter, release and liberated, these paintings were both somatic and cathartic. Rising from darkness into light the knowledge of the energy of the cosmos, although I had not yet realised this, on reflection, was already beginning to let itself be known to me.

Figure 2, which was the first acrylic painting I did, was a reflection on what I had realised about the divine within me and took six years to process before I painted it. What I had gathered in understanding whilst painting Figure 2, took me to a place where I had the courage to walk in my God/self. This then enabled me to speak my truth through my art about my experience in the world as a woman. Figure 5 below shows the external world impacting on my internal world as a child. Life is also calling to me, as a grown woman, I cannot keep



Figure 5 'Oppression, Suppression, Repression' oil 1993. Megan Clay

A depiction of multiple entrapments within the body creating feelings of being suffocated, prevented me from moving forward, stunted, trapped inside and voiceless. The child in me is pushed down. The red shafted hand represents anger, control and authority. The blue represents the spiritual element of my child. As a child I am oppressed so learn to repress the pain I am feeling. I take those feelings deep down inside myself and store them away in a hidey hole shutting the door tight behind them, but they do not stay hidden forever. Hope lies outside the body where the erotically energetic discharge from within explodes into the flow of life that enfolds the subjects body, release from the pain is experienced.

these feelings in and they explode in waves of pent up energy. Figure 6 'Mother', below demonstrates some of the feelings of loss that I spoke about earlier and also depicts me in an act of supplication. The image represents my physical role as mother both to my children, the adults around me that needed mothering in some way and as a mother to my own inner child that was wounded and felt helpless.



Figure 6 'Mother', oil 1994. Megan Clay

This is an image of mother in an act of supplication. The air around her is moved by this plea. She is totally animated in her prayerfulness. Her openness reveals her emotional woundedness, her creativity, vulnerability and intimate connection with her children. Tears and melancholy express feelings of helplessness loss and grief.



Figure 7 'New Beginnings', oil 1994. Megan Clay

This image represents the end of a process, heralding a time of celebration. The green leaves and berries represent the fruit of my labour and the river of life runs through me representing the water of life that Jesus speaks about in the Gospel of John 4: 5-42. I was so aware of beginning the process of uncovering layers of understanding about myself and my life experience so far within my paintings.

Figure 7 above represents the way in which even in the uncertainty of pain and loss there is a revelatory moment where I could see that I had through the counselling and painting gained tools for the continuing journey. My art was one of these tools and this image 'New Beginnings' is one of celebration that represents inner growth, the end of a process and the beginning of another, which would take me forward to yet new understandings. It took a long time for me to realise what was going on in my internal world and that both internally and externally things were not okay, but through painting I found an abundance of life amongst

this multi-layered trauma. It was through this image that I found a way to celebrate me, as a fully embodied divine human being.

My faith journey continued through to the year 2000, two years into my undergraduate degree when I left regular Church attendance. This is where I began to find another community, one led by the women I was to meet within the writings of feminist liberation theologies.

Art That Speaks Through Feminist Theological Discourses

As an undergraduate in Theology/Philosophy I was given an opportunity to exhibit the six paintings that had been born out of my earlier therapeutic process. This was an extremely vulnerable time for me and I was deeply affected by the response of male students and lecturers alike because they were extraordinarily angry and denigrating. This response immediately reminded me of my experience of Church and of the world about me. The general response of most of the female students and lecturers was very different in that they wanted to explore, talk and listen to what I had to say about my work and most important of all they could relate to the images. I realised at this point that my paintings were speaking to male and female people, in very diverse ways. At this stage of my journey, through feminist theology the seeds for a verbal language for my images were being planted. Lisa Isherwood's multifaceted Christology really spoke to me as did her discourse on the dangers of the 'impotency of metaphysics... to Christian theology'¹² and her suggestion that maybe the early Christian writers had been misinterpreted 'It seems entirely possible that what the early Christian writers were conveying about incarnation was not a once-and-for-all-event but the knowledge that unless we are fully in our bodies, we will never be able to explore our divinity'.¹³

It was here that I started making theological connections with my art which I began to experience anew. A narrative of understanding was being released and I started seeing the language of my own containment within the images of my six therapeutic paintings.

Isherwood's words of 'spiralling incarnation being the diverse experience of women within feminist liberation theological discourse that involves itself with the many and diverse struggles for women's dignity, equality and humanity'¹⁴ made a huge impact on me. This enabled me to realise that even through the pain of my experience, I could see the movement and release within my paintings that showed not only obvious violation but were also celebratory and transformative in their form. This demonstrates that however diverse the

¹² Isherwood, 1999, *op.cit.*, p.145.

¹³ *op.cit.*, p.144.

¹⁴ Lisa Isherwood 'The Embodiment of Feminist Liberation Theology: Spiralling of Incarnation' in Beverly Clack, (ed.), *Embodying Feminist Liberation Theologies: A Special Edition of The Journal of Feminist Theology BISFT*, January 2004, Vol. 12.2, ch.1. p.154.

experience our bodies are 'fearfully and wonderfully made'.¹⁵

Carter Heyward's 'mutuality in relationship' along with her thoughts and writings on *dunamis*¹⁶ as being the raw erotic energy of the Divine, that enables us to god the earth as co-creators, helped me understand that I was part of the body of Christ within the cosmos. As my earlier experience had suggested, *dunamis* expanded the picture showing me that the Church was only one part of a much bigger picture. Heyward suggested that we needed to reimage Jesus as a way forward to be more inclusive. 'Re-imaging may mean letting go of tradition, one such letting go is realising that Jesus only matters if he was human and if we view his Incarnation as a relational experience'.¹⁷ This an experience mutual vulnerability, made me realise my humanity as a woman and that along a broader spectrum I was very much part of a Christological community or as Rita Brock calls it Christa community, I was part of a 'community of wounded healers',¹⁸ which included women and others on the margins of many different global societies and traditions. The concepts of *dunamis* and wounded healers enabled me to bring my past experience into the present in a revelatory way, bringing me to consciousness and connecting me to that first acrylic painting of Figure 2 'In the Depths of the Divine'. I was now able to put these experiences within a theological frame that were part of the bigger Christa community. The language of my colonised body was changing, I had begun a process of being set free because I had begun to find my voice and my art was part of my theological method.

I found the fourth element, of creative actualisation, in Schüssler Fiorenza's hermeneutics of suspicion¹⁹ particularly useful for my images. However, I would not have been able to come to a constructive use of creative actualisation had I not reflected on her first three elements, suspicion, proclamation and remembrance, in relation to the Church and my own body within that community. It was understanding her examination of biblical texts and their patriarchal language, which had made women invisible historically, that highlighted my own embodied history. Once this is located, she expands spaces to be filled with women's presence and discourse making them visible in order to re-create and re-image their narrative and presence. In this theoretical practice Schüssler Fiorenza says it is important to reclaim Christian heritage for women because of their power, because of their presence that has gone

¹⁵ Psalm 139: 14.

¹⁶ Heyward, *op.cit.*, p. 41.

¹⁷ *op.cit.*, p.31.

¹⁸ Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991), Ch. 4., pp.71-88.

¹⁹ The theorising of this methodology can be found in Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983, *op.cit.*, p.32.

largely unnoticed or has not been respected. She is not alone in this as the creator of 'The Dinner Party', artist Judy Chicago, tells us that '...women's heritage is their power'.²⁰

I see the correlation between their words and the narrative of my body which had laboured under patriarchal restraints. I began to realise my absence, and the lack of presence to myself let alone to others. Now I see that my paintings made me painfully present, in fact they were screaming out to be noticed because of their content. I later discovered that this is what Schüssler Fiorenza would call creative actualisation.²¹ Her intention is to put women literally back into the picture in a creative way by the use of imagination. Schüssler Fiorenza does this by not only re-creating biblical narrative within the text for women, she also acknowledges this process through the various art forms and ritual of other women. The act of painting did indeed create a liturgical space that told my story that actually brought to life what had for me been lost in translation through the various words and actions of patriarchal power. This process of creating the art work was a co-redemptive liturgical praxis. I had put myself back into the picture, this was the beginning of re-imaging and re-creating of my life - in my daily life I was well into Schüssler Fiorenza's hermeneutical cycle.

Witnessing Each Other Rise

The process of painting and being seen are integral, the meeting of the artist and spectator is a relationship, art and performance do not exist outside the space of the artist and spectator.²² Both need each other to be present in the creation of the art and in this process the observer can be emotionally moved. This is the space for realising a sense of mutual relationship even across time and space. It could be seen as communion and prayer or the unfolding of a Christa community. I think that art or any creative art form is needed to express what is intrinsically important to women's subjectivity because it translates what Julia Kristeva and Irigaray call *jouissance* the sexuality of woman which is lost in translation within phallogocentric language and monotheism. Both Kristeva and Irigaray use this term in relation to women's creative value, energy and power.²³

Feminist liberation theologies enable the passionate language of visual art as another way to 'hear women into speech'.²⁴ The foundations of this valuable methodological praxis have been built on the voices and action of feminist liberation theologians such as Letty

²⁰ Judy Chicago, *The Dinner party: A Symbol of Our Heritage* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1979), pp. 246-49.

²¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, 1995, *op.cit.*, p.xx.

²² Janet Adler, *Offering of the Conscious Body: The Discipline of Authentic Movement* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2002), p.34.

²³ See for example Kristeva, 1984, *ibid*; and Luce Irigaray, *Elemental Passions* (London: The Athlone Press, 1992).

²⁴ This is one of the foundations on which feminist theologies are built upon, see Nellie Morton, *The Journey is Home* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), p.205.

Russell, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Carter Heyward, Beverly Wildung Harrison, Valerie Saiving, Katy Cannon, Mary Hunt, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Lisa Isherwood, Marcella Althaus-Reid. The list is nowhere near exhaustive. Not only have feminist liberation theologies enabled and empowered me to interweave my art with the language of theological experience but I continue to fill my flesh by feasting on their words of wisdom. What I am so mindful of now through engaging with feminist theologies, as with my art, is that what happens to our bodies is important in terms of what we take into them, what is said to us, how we are treated and what is done to us. These attitudes and ideas all impact on human beings and affect the subjectivity of girls and women particularly in theology for this work, where negative attitudes have damaged females in the name of the divine.

As my education continues through my research for this thesis I have realised that I do not stand alone in my experience. Many women have suffered similar experiences²⁵ to mine and this includes young adolescent women with problems that stem from girlhood. This is one of the points that I will be addressing throughout my thesis. Girlhood seems to be ignored as a category, even with feminist and liberation theologies, yet girls in girlhood desperately need nurturing into healthy adolescence and beyond. The cost of the socialisation of gender conformity within our patriarchal world is high. Rosemary Radford Ruether points out, 'that adolescent girls pay a heavy price to learn these lessons of silence and submission. Eating disorders, cutting, depression, even suicide are some of the extreme ways that the stresses of conformity express themselves.'²⁶ The silenced voice of the girl child within the categorised conformity of stereotypical gender norms is the legacy that they are born into, the questioning of which takes its toll at different experiential stages of life. There needs to be another starting point to create another way of expressing these anxieties. I personally have found that writing is not enough to express my thoughts and feelings. Painting becomes another way to speak and express what I am thinking theologically.

During Easter 2004 I completed a water colour painting which I named 'She is Risen' in Figure 8 below. This is an embodied Christological image of woman rising out of her patriarchal constrained body and realising her incarnational value in the world as co-creator, prophetess, minister, teacher, healer and Sophia Wisdom which was inspired primarily by the Christologies of Heyward, Brock and Isherwood. This is not a metaphysical experience and I am not rising up out of my body rather I am rising up out of the depths within myself. I am rising up out of the core of my being after diving deep within. The colours within this image represent different

²⁵ The recent disturbing news of the sex abuse scandals of the Jimmy Saville case has drawn many other high profile figures and celebrities into the spotlight. www.guardian.co.uk/media/2012/oct/11/jimmy-saville-sex-abuse-claims [Accessed Thursday 11th October 2012].

²⁶ Ruether in Baker, *op.cit.* p.vii.

aspects of myself in relation to the earth, nature and also to my experience and personal journey, which has been expressed in the images in Figures 1-7 shown earlier above.

The image in Figure 8 'She is Risen' arose out of a volcanic resonance within, which I felt in my body whilst painting a previous image in watercolour entitled 'Awaiting Resurrection', in Figure 9 below. This image demonstrates not only my own experience but potentially, the experience of other women whom I have read or met, all of which seem to tell a similar story. These include women both within and outside of the Church, in the west and beyond, who labour under oppressive situations both personally and politically and are indeed awaiting resurrection into equal participation.



Figure 8 'She is Risen' watercolour 2004. Megan Clay

She is risen indeed, this is a time of fluidity of movement and transition. The integrated selves are interwoven with each other representing both the sexual and spiritual part of my own embodiment. Feelings within my bodily sensations of unfurling space as it surges up from within. These feelings rise from a spark of knowing and recognition that there is always more to know and unravel and transcend into.

However, it is not a passive waiting it is full of loss pain and anger as the image shows the female form has a fiery furnace in her solar plexus and the genital area of her body. The feeling whilst painting this image was one of imminent explosion that spoke to me with the hope of infinite possibilities beyond the control of patriarchal constraints. This impulse again was a need to break out into life vivaciously in the freedom that the abundance of life can offer. There was a sense of death and resurrection for me. The body as a revelatory space for such paradoxes is not new to the Christian journey. This image marked another beginning, a new way for my art to be seen as part of a feminist theological discourse because again it is located in my embodied experience. Feminist body theology takes seriously the experiences and conditions of 'the bodies' of women.



Figure 9 'Awaiting Resurrection', watercolour 2004. Megan Clay

The body holds things sometimes unknowingly, reconnecting to our bodies enables us to alleviate what is hidden and trapped that block us and hold us down. Reconnecting ourselves to the wonderful abilities our bodies have can reintegrate those experiences back into the body in a more healthy and acceptable way on a personal level opening up a relational channel to others in a mutual way. Our sexual/spiritual lives depend on the free flowing movement within our bodies.

Although not a body theologian, Catherine Keller makes it clear to us that our embodiment is firmly rooted in the cosmos²⁷ as indicated in Genesis 1. She believes that with this understanding humankind can be moved toward new ways of seeing power relations and setting things in better balance. Her work helped me understand in another way the surges of cosmic power and volatile explosiveness that connected me with my art, to others.

Bodies and Cosmologies

Diarmuid O'Murchu also sees the next step in theological engagement as being with the new cosmology,²⁸ as set out by Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry. Interestingly Jack



Figure 10 'A Place Where Stars Are Born', painting on silk Megan Clay 2009-2011.

'Cosmic explosions' are a series of paintings that I have created on silk. This process leads to an explosion of colour which remind me of nebulae, exploding stars, galaxies and the primordial flaring forth that bursts out of the quantum moment, at the beginning of time. It also shows some of my inner experience that I feel in my sexual/spiritual world. It is in this way that this image describes as much about my internal world and bodily experiences as the others that I have painted.

Different forms appear within these patterns that are created by salt and water interacting with the paint. Faces emerge along with animals, fish and symbols of the feminine all created by the fluidity of that interaction. The explosion of the paint on the silk simultaneously produces an explosion in me that is visceral in its effect and is like an organic performance. I can feel the movement within me dancing, flowing and connecting with the movement of the materials I am using. Painting in this medium can also be a calming, meditative and reflective practice and is both free flowing liturgical response and prayer and is a way of reconnecting me to myself and to others so is interconnected and incarnate.

²⁷ See Catherine Keller, *Face Of The Deep: A Theology Of Becoming* (London and New York; Routledge, 2003).

²⁸ See Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Quantum Theology: Spiritual Implications of the New Physics* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2004).

Mahoney suggests that evolutionary science and Christianity have not considered seriously enough the divine incarnational value within their joint rich resources. He was responding to an address by Pope John Paul II who at a Conference in 1988 questioned the relationship between Christianity and evolution. Mahoney suggested that evolution and theological anthropology were positive partners in relation to the body of Christ.²⁹ For Keller and O'Murchu this is also the case. They believe that the position of women, sexuality and our relation with the earth – all issues they consider to be encompassed in the body of Christ - will be opened up and greatly improved by a true-cosmological understanding. This is because it moves beyond the traditional theological understanding of incarnation by expanding it into a cosmic incarnation. By reading these theologians I realised that my experiences of God with me and the connection to the cosmos that I had encountered, offered me a place of reflection from which to expand a feminist liberation body theology. I am still unfolding the language for my previous images and the ones I continue to paint out of this ongoing experiential process of life as woman.

The image above in Figure 10, echoes the explosive reality of physical sensation I experience whilst painting on silk, singing, listening to music, or watching a moving performance. This is grounded in what I experience when connecting to the Divine within, making this image for me a cosmic embodied reality. Charlene Spretnak tells us 'that all too often...it is said that everything in life is "just made up" a social convention, a discourse, a mere narrative'³⁰ but actually the reality is that 'our narratives or ways of thinking are grounded in our bodily experiences, in nature and society'³¹ and, I wish to suggest, the cosmos itself in which we have our embodied home.

This thesis is therefore born out of my own experiences of abuse, of the liberating energy of the divine within, that struggled for a language in a society and church, but found a voice in art and a passionate desire to find a new model for our female children, one of empowered embodiment and radical connection. A model, which I hope will make them less vulnerable than I believe the present patriarchal system of dualistic divisions and narrow boundaries actually does make them. Therefore I will examine what Christianity offers us in the areas of sexuality and spirituality related to children and particularly the girl child. I will then move on to ask if the interdisciplinary mingling of the new cosmology with feminist

²⁹ Jack Mahoney, *Christianity in Evolution: An Exploration* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011). p.ix.

³⁰ Charlene Spretnak, *The Resurgence of the Real: Body, Nature and Place in a Hypermodern World* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 4.

³¹ *ibid.*

theology, offers bigger, bolder and more creative spaces in which to grow empowered and passionate girl children.

My methodology section will clearly show why feminist theologies, based as they are in reflection and praxis as lived experience, are the best methods for this work. Further I will show how accompanying the theoretical work with art expands the language of the female body and explores its future potential when placed in a cosmic dimension. The methodology section will explore both the strengths and weaknesses of my chosen methods.

In section one I will begin by investigating the sexual life of the child and particularly the female child as understood within the Christian theological arena. My art will weave through this section as part of my theological response to the sexuality of the child. I will examine a selection of reports on human sexuality from the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches in order to establish their current thinking on this matter. I will then look at contemporary theologians such as Isherwood, Heyward, Althaus-Reid, Nelson, Ellison, Goss and others who work in the areas of body theology, sexual theologies and feminist theologies, as it is in these areas I would expect to find open and inclusive work which may embrace children and the female child. In this section I hope to find a theology that lays the foundations for the inclusion and liberation of the female child.

In section two I will investigate notions of spirituality in relation to the child within the Christian tradition. In this section I will examine the Church Fathers because I believe the way in which they formulated a dualistic notion of Christian life based on the split between body and spirit has laid the foundations for much negative theology in the present day. I will argue that this is damaging to all children, but the female child has borne the greatest weight of this tradition since the female has been viewed as the material side of this dualistic split. Within this understanding both women and nature have been placed at the bottom of a divine hierarchy. Their very natures have been understood as excluding them from the highest spiritual realms. I will examine how the Fathers translated this into rigorous spiritual formation for the female child. In this section I will also examine theological and educational voices who speak of children's spirituality. I will also include work on intergenerational trauma as a way of demonstrating the physical impact of centuries of body/mind/spirit dualism. In addition to this, I will link the experiential aspects of my art work to show how embodied experiences often lack creative channels to express feeling and emotions which lie trapped within the body on an energy level. These symptomatically become physical as the child grows into adulthood and they can prove difficult to deal with because of how deeply they are embedded.

In section three I will explore the new potential for the female child within the as yet under researched area of the new cosmology and theology. I will examine the work of

Diarmuid O'Murchu, Catherine Keller and Lisa Isherwood to draw out more positive starting points within our material embodied story. The purpose of this section is to create a less confined space in which the child may flourish. The work to date in the area of the new cosmology/quantum theology has not directly addressed the child or more particularly the female child. It is therefore in this interdisciplinary mingling of quantum theology, the new cosmologies, body theology and feminist theologies with a focus on the female child that I believe my originality lies. Section three is interwoven with more of my art work giving embodied life to much of the theory with which I am dealing. This art is also where my originality lies as it comes from the mingling of interdisciplinary theories and lived experiences. The art work is entirely mine and not based on any work that is known to me. My conclusion will draw out my findings, their originality and further questions that my research has generated.

Methodology

The subject of my thesis is female sexuality and spirituality and I progress towards re-imagining the feminine Divine. I am primarily focusing on the female child and I am using as my methodology feminist liberation theology which is made up of multiple strands of experiential knowledge of women and other marginalised subjects. My main aim is to build an informed body of work that will provide a platform for empowering the female child. This contrasts with the models that are grounded in patriarchal theology, global capitalism and misogyny, which demand that she gives away her pleasure, desire and power to patriarchy. The theoretical model I am attempting to create will look toward re-claiming, re-storing and re-imagining an embodiment of the feminine that will give the female child her own sense of spiritual/sexual agency which is her power within the world. It is my hope that this model will enable the female child to discover her pleasure and desire which will ground her in a sense of value and self-worth. The feminist liberation theological method I am using to construct this theoretical body of work is grounded in orthopraxis which operates in the space of location and reflective action as opposed to orthodoxy which reigns in the realm of fixed theoretical ideals. This investigation seeks to understand more about the bodies and experiential lives of girl children, in order to give the girl child a voice both within patriarchal theology and beyond its boundaries into an open ended space of the cosmos. Feminist liberation theologies can enable her development. I demonstrate that art can be a component of this methodological approach and my art contributes to the active research within this thesis.

Feminist liberation theologies are based on the liberation cycle of action, reflection, action which closely resembles the model of theological action research. The latter requires that it is context-based, meaning that real life problems are addressed. It is a collaborative process by researcher and participant where everyone's contribution is taken seriously. This research method allows for the diversity of experience and the competence of contributors which leads to new actions and new meanings emerging from the research process.¹ I am drawn more to the feminist liberation model for my work as it understands 'contributors' to be the global community of women. I will also include Schüssler Fiorenza's hermeneutic of suspicion in this feminist methodology as it enables art to emerge as a method in the area she calls creative actualisation. Understanding art in this way is expanding her notion of creative actualisation.

¹ Helen Cameron, Deborah Bhatti, Catherine Duce, James Sweeney and Clare Watkins, *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010), p.12.

Schüssler Fiorenza's four hermeneutic principles,² will be helpful methodological tools in this analysis of the female child and her position within theological narratives written about her. Her first principle is a hermeneutics of suspicion which she uses to examine the text for androcentric language that holds patriarchy in a place of authority throughout our theological history which not only affects women, but also men and children and the rest of creation. The second principle is a hermeneutic of proclamation which finds space within the text that can suitably proclaim women's presence in an empowering way both liturgically and ethically. The third principle is a hermeneutic of remembrance which enables reconstruction of women's heritage within the text in order to value and empower, and the fourth principle is a hermeneutic of creative actualization that puts women literally back into the picture of theological history in a creative way by the use of imagination through various art forms, liturgy and ritual. Schüssler Fiorenza uses all four principles to recognise, re-connect, re-member and re-store the place of the woman within biblical texts. She does this by defining the problem and then expands woman space within biblical text in order to re-name and re-claim spiritual power in the struggle for women's liberation³ and to re-imagine a discourse within the text that will tell her story from a Christian woman's perspective of her place in history to now in order to also make it her story. Schüssler Fiorenza reminds us that everything within western society relies on both historical and theological reflections, because, everything that we live by now has been influenced by these patriarchal meta-narratives. So the reconstruction of early Christian origins from a feminist perspective is not just an historical one, but also a 'feminist theological task',⁴ thus bringing to light both the religious and the political-cultural issues. Schüssler Fiorenza says that, the transformative process takes place for women in the re-membering within biblical texts and 'depends on a critical reappropriation of the past',⁵ because of the destructive elements that these texts hold for women. Part of this process then can be achieved by 'looking beyond and through the text',⁶ in order to expand women's space making her presence within the text visible. I will rely on Schüssler Fiorenza's four principles to bring the female child's presence into view as a subject in both the historical and the theological context in this work. Recognition of her absence is imperative because throughout my research I have discovered that the female child is almost invisible as most of the rhetoric addresses children in the male gender. After all we know that there are female children as well as male, therefore I explore the historical and theological landscape in order to

² Schüssler Fiorenza, 1995, *op.cit.*, p. xxiv.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *op.cit.*, p.31.

⁵ *op.cit.*, p.42.

⁶ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Feminism without Illusions: A Critique of Individualism* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p.236.

bring to light the presence of the female child. Once located, the task is then to reintegrate her back into the picture by proclaiming her presence both through the language of art and the helpful voices of selected feminist theologians including my own.

Therefore within my work, just as Schüssler Fiorenza mines biblical texts I too will have to dig deep and mine within the theological text to bring those essential veins to light.⁷ A hermeneutics of suspicion will be needed to delve into the phallogocentric language that excludes all that is female and in this case the female child. This methodological approach will open the space to see, give voice and re-imagine, building on what is there already however small. The art I am creating will be based on Schüssler Fiorenza's fourth principle creative actualisation which I wish to expand beyond biblical text and into the narrative of the cosmos which has been influenced by the Christian story. The first part of my art illustrates the unfolding story of our cosmological journey, from the Big Bang, to our life on Earth in the form of a mural. This encompasses the re-membling, interconnection and relatedness of the feminine in the creation story and giving sacred space for a theological process to take place. Other art I have created makes visible the female body out of the chaotic depths of 'Tohu Vabohu',⁸ the void and the chaos of Genesis 1 out of which the world was created and for my art, the depths within woman that without the language of feminist theology led many to see themselves as chaotic and mad.

It is important to this body of work with regard to the female child that we re-engage with the loss of the feminine and the maternal beginnings because of the inherited legacy of patriarchal oppression that still dictates so many of the defining values of women in western society, within both the theological world and the secular. Schüssler Fiorenza enables the legitimate use of creative actualisation in theology and Catherine Keller gives meaning⁹ to some of the deep and disturbing images that often emerge when women engage with this process.

I will use Keller's work to explore ways of restoring knowledge of an empowering birth right to the female child. Keller disrupts and destabilises the patriarchal myth of the creation story 'Ex Nihilo' bypassing the early Christian interpretation of Genesis 1 and re-directs and encourages us to see the multiplicity of beginnings within the text, to see the potential for infinite possibilities of becoming as the spirit hovers over the face of the deep, which she tells us is a Tehomic space. A Tehomic space is the chaos and the void. It is a space for creative expansion and expression which is an important space for women. Keller alerts us to the

⁷ Adrienne Rich, *The Dream of Common Language* (New York: Norton, 1978), pp.60-7.

⁸ Keller, *op.cit.*, p.4.

⁹ *op.cit.*, pp.30-31.

'tehomophobic'¹⁰ tendencies of patriarchy, fear of chaos and the deep, which she says has been attributed to the feminine/woman.¹¹ Out of this fear of woman, woman who is both the chaos in the deep and the feminine face of God that covers it, patriarchy had to establish a well-constructed, ordered and controlled environment. The patriarchal system sterilised everything in its path and left in its wake the disempowered, dismembered body of the female divine, the dismembered Goddess, Sophia wisdom. I argue that this disconnection of the feminine will have had a negative effect and influence on child rearing, particularly of the female child, within the western Christian family. The power of naming¹² is important to acknowledge and in relation to this body of work it enables the female child to acknowledge that how she is named is not the end of the story, she may re-connect to the liberative creative fluidity of the deep, our very beginnings in which she is fully embedded as powerful. This accordingly will enable us to see the interconnected and interdependent value of the chaotic feminine within the cosmological order of things. Keller uses 'Chaosmos'¹³ to integrate the void and chaos which has been attributed to the feminine. The journey back to the maternal is an important one for the female child because the beginnings of her becoming woman lay there, an act of re-engagement will enable her to begin her journey home,¹⁴ a journey of flourishing. Keller's approach will be helpful for me in opening up the space to a cosmic vista in which to explore other ways of seeing sexuality and spirituality in a more integrated and relational way. The tehomic and the chaosmos of which Keller speaks will both be important components of the methodology of creative actualisation.

The transitional process from child to maiden/woman/crone has not only become lost, but has been distorted and a trans-generational relational void has been created which we urgently need to bridge. We need to reclaim the wisdom of our foremothers allowing them to re-emerge to re-create and to re-store a healthy flourishing sexual/spiritual development for the now and future female child. The foundational living stones of action and reflection and action that form the methodology of a liberative praxis hold the wisdom for bridging this gap. This trans-generational relational void has left questions for me about a theological frame in which to develop an educative praxis that informs the female child of her-story in a positive and powerful way. This opposes to the way the female child has become prey and open to commodification and exploitation, within the field of heteronormative values. The devaluing and victimisation of the feminine today, in my view, is deeply rooted within traditional heteropatriarchal theology, where women have not been given equality or dignity within the

¹⁰ *op.cit.*, p. 27.

¹¹ *op.cit.*, p.29.

¹² See for example Eva Ensler, *Vagina Monologues* (London: Virago Books, 2004).

¹³ Keller, *op.cit.*, p.13.

¹⁴ Morton, 1985, *ibid.*

community of believers. This is why I think feminist liberation theology can help re-claim, re-imagine and re-create stories and rituals for the female child, only much earlier in her development, in a life giving nurturing way. Only by enabling this release of the feminine out of the void and by acknowledging and recovering her loss in translation can we see what part 'The Logos' of man has played in this deformation of all that is female and creative. The solidity of the interpretation of 'The Logos' has had a stagnating effect on all that is creatively fluid within human becoming and has set in place systems of constraint that we understand as patriarchal. These systems are so embedded that they are often not visible to the human eye or consciousness. Yet, the presence of these constraints are often felt by female intuition that is not fully recognised and is cast down into what patriarchy considers to be the lower realms of body and matter. This leaves the Word to define all that is divine from its own beginning, giving everything that is created predominantly to the male, leaving the feminine alienated and in a strange land. Feminist theology is able to engage systemically with all oppression that women have suffered and it will have ears to hear and eyes to see. Schüssler Fiorenza reminds us, 'women need to be seen as intellectual subjects and socio-political agents for change'¹⁵ for us to create a liberative praxis. So along with June Boyce-Tillman¹⁶ I will be acknowledging and valuing women's unconventional wisdom as a ground for theology. This knowledge is embedded in intuitive ways of knowing that are most often found in the bodies of women. For Boyce-Tillman knowledge cannot be split between body and mind, it needs to be more fluid and open ended in order to make wisdom manifest.

Part of this body of work is the creative practice of visual art, which is used as a complementary language and knowledge in the investigation of sexuality/sensuality and spirituality. Within this I am looking at the interdependent and relational value of who we are in our bodies and the way we are connected to the cosmos. It is an open ended process, which helps us move into new spaces of becoming and unfolding in a spiritually embodied way.

The art I am creating has a narrative quality that speaks of the experiential thus making it part of the methodology of feminist liberation theology. The part my art plays in this methodological relationship gives visual image of storytelling, emotion and connection of spiritual/sexual female energies, in an attempt to transgress existing patriarchal boundaries that have contained and stunted the creative flow of women's humanity. Art created by women can open up the vision that many women have of their incarnational value showing

¹⁵ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of Naming: A Concillium Reader in Feminist Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996). p. xix.

¹⁶ See June Boyce-Tillman, *Unconventional Wisdom: Gender, Theology and Spirituality* (London, Oakley: Equinox, 2008).

that they do indeed inhabit a space of a deep embodied spirituality.¹⁷ The language of women's experience is deeply located within her body and phallogentric language has not served women well because of the male signifier within it.¹⁸ Feminist art opens the spaces within the word to allow the language of the feminine 'jouissance'¹⁹ to speak; thus enabling an emergent possibility of creating another dimension to the methodology of feminist liberation theologies to tell the stories of women's experience.

Art as a Feminist Theological Praxis

Although theology and art are not unusual bedfellows, feminist liberation theologies and art are a relatively new concept. The European Society of Women in Theological Research (ESWTR) has just launched a new project in their journal called 'Feminist Theology and Visual Arts' November 2011, indicating that this concept is still embryonic within a feminist theological forum. Feminist art has been around for a while on the fringes of classical art and feminist artist Judy Chicago is one female artist who tells of her struggle within the academic masculine arena of the art world. Her experience prompted her to open a teaching space for young female artists to share another way of expressing and defining their experience as women through their art. The results were both disturbing and exciting and led to a permanent exhibition of female art.²⁰ Chicago's art installation *'The Dinner Party'*²¹ brings to our attention the remembering of a whole host of women throughout time who have been lost through the telling of his/story. Chicago, brings them to table literally. She was so incensed by women's absence that she made a journey which took her to the edges of time or to as far as she could go to our conscious beginnings. Her female imagery and symbols of the vulva decorate the plates and the table itself is the shape of a triangle which speaks for itself because of its significant form. This is one of her many contributions to the art world which have helped to actualise the presence of women in the human story.

In 1975 feminist artist Edwina Sandys created the bronze Christa²² which was exhibited in the Brooklyn Museum, New York. It was designed for 'The United Nations Decade for Women' and at that time transgressed the boundaries of the white western male Christ. In fact it troubled the waters of patriarchal thought in 1984 when placed in a Church in Manhattan,

¹⁷ When I speak of living an embodied spirituality I mean to live what we think is ethical in a justice seeking way, to own how we feel, fully through the body in a sensual, relational and interconnective way. To be aware of who we are in our skin through sickness, health, joy, pleasure, pain, sorrow etc. Try to be as honest as we can with ourselves and others as we unfold into our human/divine becoming which is incarnational.

¹⁸ Kristeva, *op.cit.*, pp.68-71.

¹⁹ *op.cit.*, p.80.

²⁰ Judy Chicago, *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist* (New York: Authors Choice Press, 2006), pp.70-92.

²¹ Chicago, 1979, *op.cit.*, pp.28-268.

²² <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org> [Accessed 7th July 2009].

New York.²³ Sandy was not alone in creating disturbing images of Christas. The Bosnian Christa stitched by Margaret Argyle was created in the 'context of a religious meditation...as a personal Lenten reflection on the plight of women who were raped and forcibly impregnated in the former Yugoslavia 1993.'²⁴ It too caused a stir in theological circles as it represented a female Figure on the cross situated within a vulva signifying the sexual oppression and pain of women in their bodies.

As these few examples demonstrate feminism and art have been expressing the subjectivity of women for a few decades now in retaliation against the objectification of woman within classical art through the male gaze. Art gives us another way of seeing and impacts in a different way to the written word. Feminist art brings us to consciousness of the plight of women within patriarchy 'under' the Christian monotheistic²⁵ God so it fits well with the methodology of feminist liberation theology and can be one form of the creative actualisation of which Schüssler-Fiorenza speaks. I have a particular interest in Frida Kahlo²⁶ the Mexican painter who painted from the heart of her experience of both her internal and external environment. She painted from both the political and the personal which were always interwoven within her work. This is the ground that I paint from, intentionally making them both speak through a feminist and theological genre. We do not yet have words for all we know as women - this is where my art attempts to speak and to connect - to resonate with people in a way that words cannot always do especially when we are moving towards concepts we do not yet understand.

Art Work in the Garden

The main body of my art work is situated in the cosmic garden as part of the cosmic walk on the West Downs campus of the University of Winchester, in Hampshire. It comprises fifteen panels on a fenced area approximately one hundred and twenty feet in length. This installation is part of the cosmic walk of creation and human evolution. The intention is to open up another way of transferring knowledge to children in a creative tactile way, through image, texture, colour form and storytelling. The images below show different views of the cosmic

²³ The Maundy Services at the Episcopal Cathedral of St John the Divine in Manhattan included what were seen as familiar symbols of a progressive liturgy such as a dramatic reading and a symbolic dance. But when a four-foot bronze statue of Jesus on the cross was unveiled, gasps could be heard throughout the main chapel. The Christus was, in fact, a Christa, complete with undraped breasts and rounded hips. <http://www.time.com> [Accessed 7th July 2009].

²⁴ Julie Clague 'The Christa: Symbolising My Humanity and My Pain', in Lisa Isherwood, Janet Wootton, Julie Clague and Lilikalou Hughes, (eds.), *The Journal of Britain and Ireland School of Feminist Theology*, September 2005 vol. 14.1, pp. 83-108.

²⁵ Daphne Hampson 'The Sacred The Feminine and French Feminist Theory', in Griselda Pollock and Sauron, Victoria Turvey, (eds.), *The Sacred and the Feminine: Imagination and Sexual Difference* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009). Ch.3 pp.61-74.

²⁶ See Isabel Alcantara, *Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera* (Munich, London, New York: Prestel Publishers, 2005), also, Andrea Kettenmann, *Khalo* (London: Taschen, 2003).



Figure 11 'View of the Mural from the beginning of the Cosmic walk' Megan Clay 2008

The fifteen panelled mural in the 'Cosmic Walk'. This is the view from the entrance looking down from the beginning of the walk. The first panel begins with an invitation for a time of reflection, space to think of who we are and how we fit into the bigger cosmic picture and asks the question of what part do we play and how can we co-operate with the diverse rhythms of the Universe and find our own in order to join in the dance of the cosmos.



Figure 12 'A view from planet Earth looking back through the cosmic walk mural' Megan Clay 2008

This is the view from the end of the fifteen panels, from planet earth looking back in time. Having looked at each panel and reflected on each transition we hope to reconnect to the story, the story that is part of us and that we are all a part of.



Figure 13 'A view through the Trees' Megan Clay 2008

A view from the garden area, looking through the trees as you walk through the cosmic walk that tells the story of our cosmic beginnings and the unfolding of that evolutionary journey to planet earth. As you walk through the garden, you can catch a glimpse through the trees of the mural reminding us of that journey. This is a constant reminder that we are stardust together with all life here on earth and the planet itself, mutually with nature and all that is both animate and inanimate within it. Everything is full of the dynamic energy, giving us life and maintaining our existence on a knife edge.

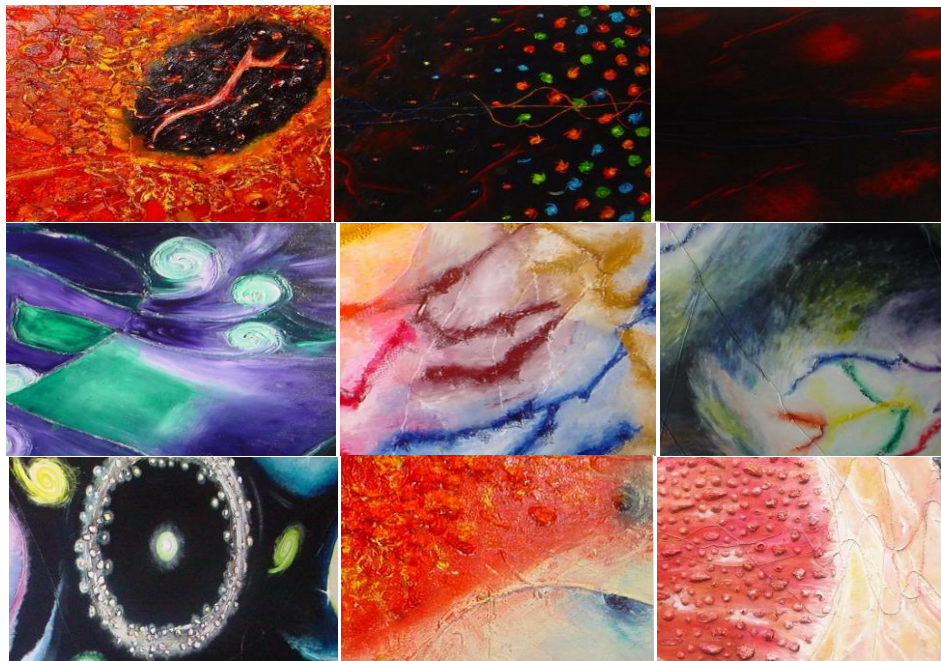


Figure 14 'Textured Fragments of the Cosmic Mural' Megan Clay 2008

These images are fragments of the cosmic mural demonstrating the different textured material used that give a tactile quality for children to engage with through sight and touch. The materials used are both organic and synthetic these are seaweed, shells, plants, wood, small pebbles, string, rope, plastic and polystyrene.

walk mural and the collaged texture of the panels. The idea is to inform our children, of who they are in relationship to everything else. The intention is to raise an awareness of their interconnectedness and interdependence spiritually and sensually awakening bodies and minds together, to engage in their own transformative process. This will begin to turn around, the downward spiralling journey of toxic destruction that we, as humans are on, in relation to

the planet itself and all the life it sustains within its ecological bio-system. The art in the garden is another level of my embodiment. These pictures were painted out of the same energetic activity that my other more personal paintings were painted from, in relation to my own engagement with my cosmic beginnings in this process. They were created in a cupboard where I carefully connected the paintings to each other with three pieces of string, progressing from one painting to another until all 15 panels were completed and ready to be installed in the cosmic walk. The process involved lively conversations and the sharing of meaningful stories with many passers-by, including workers, lecturers and students. All of which showed an interest and contributed to my own thoughts and feelings, as I painted my interpretation of this story, that had now become the story of 'our' wondrous cosmic beginnings.

Divine/Human - Incarnation and Art

My earlier pieces of art which came out of a period of counselling depict the female body as a site both of oppression and of liberation. The process of transformation between these two states can be seen through colour and form. However, the remaining body of my art work although interconnected with the panelled work of the cosmic walk is related specifically to the female body that is fully empowered and moves within its human/divine becoming. These later pieces show my emotional world that has fluidity of movement, as I remember how my body is spiritually and sexually interconnected and in this I am re-membering so that I am fully embodied. This is the space from which pleasure and desire grow so that I can begin to seek justice in a disordered world environment that is not yet equal for all. This is the model I am offering to girls because I think it is important that they realise their pleasure and desire are not commodities for patriarchal use and abuse but rather, pleasure and desire are what dreams and visions are made of. Fully realised dreams and visions are what will enable the female of the species to take her rightful place in the world as an equal participant.

The image below depicts that sexual/spiritual connection and it is interesting to see that when Gloria Steinem observed 'a group of little girls drawing hearts and she wondered if they were unconsciously remembering their own bodies as they drew - In eastern traditions the vulva is recognised as heart shaped and is revered by them. Christianity chose to ignore this reverence'.²⁷ The later pieces that are specifically created for this work show the interconnectedness of the sexual/sensual and spiritual. The image above illustrates that connection between the heart and the vagina and the relevance of that connection for women. Ensler tells us that 'The heart is capable of sacrifice, so is the vagina. It can ache for us

²⁷ Gloria Steinem, in Ensler, *op.cit.*, p. xvii.

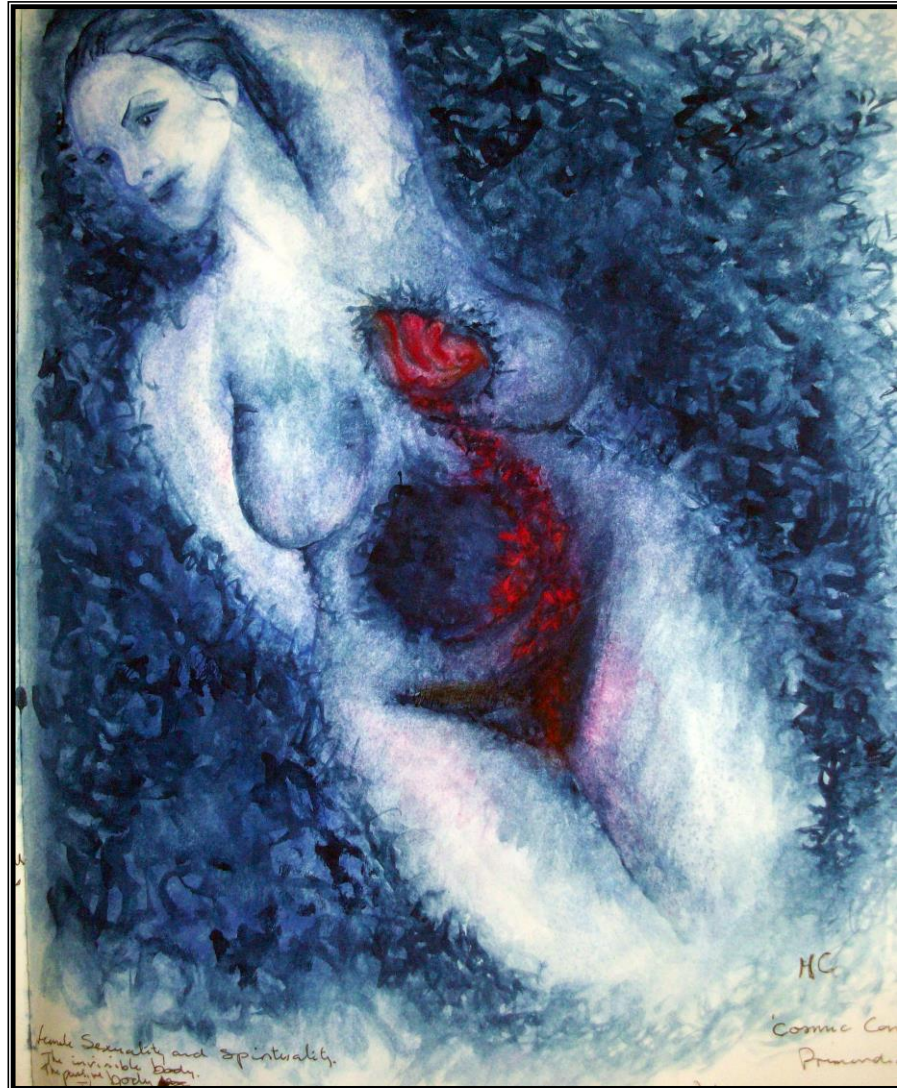


Figure 15 'Female Sexuality and Spirituality' watercolour Megan Clay 2008

Whether it be the primordial void, earth's deep schisms the ocean or women's bodies in these depths lie the deep longing of her desire.

The connection between heart and vulva demonstrate the centre from which I operate as woman. This is what gives power and voice to who I am in the world and what activates me in my life, this for me is dunamis the raw erotic energy of the divine within.

Tess Tessier speaks of authentic being which I translate as being honest and open with yourself and to not be in denial of dreams, desire and pleasure. Denial has been part of the dualistic nature of patriarchy and affects women's health because of its very nature of splitting the mind (reason/spiritual) from body (matter/sexual). As women Tessier says 'we must feed our old structures and patterns to the whirlwind, dancing the wild dance of erotic change until we are reborn. This is the wild dance of recovery and healing'. (Tessier, *op.cit.*, p.159) Healing here is about acknowledgement and acceptance of all that we are in our bodies without shame or prejudice and to live our lives as honestly as we are able. This is the knowledge we need to impart to our female children. Reconnecting to ourselves as adult women gives us the possibility of imparting such knowledge which then can become relational on a bigger scale. This is the place to stand so we may see our place in the cosmos, in a position of inter-relationality and interdependence rather than the dominating model that subdues and control women and nature that early Christianity developed within its doctrine.

This spiritual/sexual connection that I suggest is vital to this process if we are to live ethically on planet earth. All theology is sexual says Althaus- Reid and with this connection we cannot help but be open to the spirit of the divine nature of our humanity.

and stretch for us and bleed and bleed us into this difficult and wondrous world, so is the vagina'.²⁸

Art as part of a feminist theological methodology is important because transforming the future through experience and education in an integrated way is crucial for the female child who can connect in a pre-verbal way with images of female empowerment. This can also be another way of transferring knowledge. Through the language of art she will see female subjectivity before her eyes intricately connected sexually/sensually and spiritually with herself in relationship to everything in the cosmos. This replaces the empty promise of the female form that is directed towards the needs of the male gaze. I have shown in Figure 15 above how I view the interconnective value of the sexual/sensual/spiritual nature of woman.

The work of Tess Tessier has the potential to encourage women to listen to their bodies through the ancestral, primal voices and the rhythm of the universe within which can contribute toward a helpful legacy for the female child. This legacy is about getting back in touch and listening intuitively to the body, to the sound of the wild chaotic pounding 'like the clatter of a heart in terror...like someone dancing on a drum...It is the song of tectonic plates shifting and planets spinning'²⁹ which can release us as women, from the repressed patterns that we are encouraged to live by. In this she opens a window for transformation to take place calling us home to ourselves and the infinite possibilities of our female sexuality/sensuality/spirituality. There is a certain ritualistic quality to this that enhances an incarnational process releasing us into the dance of the cosmos. Tessier's work thus holds liturgical possibilities for re-creating rituals that will enable the female child on her spiritual/sensual/sexual journey of transformation. This in relation to Catherine Keller's work has the potential to open up our spiritual/sensual/sexual lives as women/female children to new possibilities of cosmic connections. It opens the space within women to dive into the unexplored depths of their bodily experience and make the theological connections with themselves and the face of the deep. This is the 'Tohu Vabohu' of Genesis which relates to the cosmos and deep space time.³⁰ This is reflected in my image in Figure 2, 'In the Depths of the Divine' which is referred to in the introduction.

The body of the female child is under the heavy fire of exploitation through the consumerist market place. This creates body issues that are born out of hatred of the body, ranging from eating disorders to cosmetic surgery. These complex body issues experienced by

²⁸ L. J. Tessier, *Dancing after the Whirlwind: Feminist Reflections on Sex, Denial and Spiritual Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), p.15.

²⁹ L. J. Tessier, *Dancing After the Whirlwind: Feminist Reflections on Sex, Denial, and Spiritual Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), p.15.

³⁰ The relative meaning and importance of Mitochondrial DNA to women's human value is discussed here in Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Ancestral Grace: Meeting God In Our Human Story* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008), p.16.

the female child arise out of the fixed ideals of patriarchal systems, where the female is taught what she ought to be and so struggles with the expectations that the system places upon her. When the distorted empowerment, which she thinks of as her power, collapses in on her, she strives to make it better in other ways so her energy is used in this self-defeating exercise. Feminist body theology relocates us in the body of our lived experience and is able to release the body into process instead of remaining in the fixed absolutes of traditional theology. The combination of process theology, liberation theology and feminist theology have enabled body theology to move forward in its reflective practice.

Body theologians Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart say that 'process thought as advocated by Alfred North Whitehead, helps to undermine dualistic thinking'.³¹ Process theology as the name suggests understands the unfolding of the divine to be a process rather than an event set out at some point in history. It allows fluidity and unfolding and thus enables any static polarities to be overcome. I could argue so does feminist theology, but the merging of process thought and liberation theology with feminist theology support the movement away from static ideals of patriarchy. This can be demonstrated in the Figure of Eve who has been viewed as bringing about the Fall which has haunted Christian theology as a 'given' and has created the distorted bodily images for women. In applying body theology as a liberative practice we can stop these cycles of domination of the female child and move into the possibility for future flourishing by being released into process. Isherwood and Stuart inform us, 'All that is worth knowing is found in the relation and this is situated in the body, the emotions and the empathetic mind'.³² Relocating embodied experience is crucial they continue, because to reach an understanding of the world we have to be in our bodies and the process of that understanding comes through a 'combination and connection of senses and mind with neither having priority but both aiming for understanding through feeling'.³³ We have been taught not to feel, not to be emotional. We have been taught to hide those expressions of our humanity or be thought of as weak, mad or hysterical. However process thought allows us fluidity to move with and beyond our bodies and connect to every part of creation in the cosmos since humans are no longer seen as set apart in the process of becoming. Process thought allows us to be released into a bigger incarnational reality yet still maintains that interdependency with all of creation in an ever expanding universe. So their work encourages a more integrated way of being in the body experientially providing more realistic images and stories of bodies. Body theology provides a more authentic and healthily

³¹ Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart, *Introducing Body Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), p.34.

³² *ibid.*

³³ *ibid.*

grounded way of being in the body which will be helpful for the female child. We see in comparison that feminist liberation body theology has a different perspective to a male body theologian like James Nelson, who although he follows a liberation theology model, still maintains an element of dualism that does not allow for an unfolding of the divine because he says that we have to look for the face of Christ in our neighbour³⁴ as the way to becoming divine. I read elements of an absolute fixed external image of Christ in this process and a Christ that we cannot fully embody in this life. Nelson does however look at masculinity and the crisis men are in because of the continued worship of a 'hard and up' phallic male Deity³⁵ that has excluded women and the feminine through the dualistic split of mind and matter. So although valuable, Nelson's body theology is viewed through a very different lens to that of Isherwood and Stuart who offer a feminist critique. Body theology for them begins with the lived experience of women's organic reality and the embodiment of the feminine divine. They are not only looking at reality of diverse and unique embodied lives, which are not universal as patriarchy would have us believe, They are in fact recognising that somewhere in women's diverse collective experience there is a call for the celebration of inclusivity. Hope for the female child lies here in this acknowledgement of diversity and opposition to the pressure to have an idealised perfect body influenced by the fashion world and celebrities. Discourses around these issues are becoming increasingly relevant with regard to the female child's future healthy spiritual/sensual/sexual development from child to woman outside the heteronormative definition given by patriarchy. The westernised, socially uncultured, female body of consumerism that feeds global capitalism can be challenged by this feminist liberation theological approach of body theology. Body talk is a vital resource which will encourage girls to talk about how they feel, think and experience life, bringing them to the point of action that is needed to change their lives that are not yet valued by both the subject and socially. Body talk can both inform the female child of who she is and can be in her body as female, as well as encouraging her to question the challenges she is faced with in the process. This makes available the infinite possibilities of spiritual/sensual/sexual unfolding within the larger picture of the cosmos because she is both beautifully and wonderfully created³⁶ and evolved, forged into being in that secret place deep in the earth and before that in the stars. Feminist body theology and process theology allow for the expansion into a bigger cosmic picture and the inclusion of the female within that expansion and they are therefore important parts of my methodology.

³⁴ See James B. Nelson, *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1979).

³⁵ See James B. Nelson, *Body Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1992).

³⁶ Psalm 139.

The claiming of divine power within the feminine will enable the female child as it is already doing for women, to be co-creators full of endless possibilities who too can be responsible for 'goddessing the earth'. This is the process that Heyward suggests enables 'the divine within us and the whole of creation to come to fullness'.³⁷ She reminds us of the divine, as the raw erotic power that is innate in all humans and it is the energy that weaves its way throughout the cosmos that brings life in abundance to everyone and everything in creation. She tells us that Jesus did not come with power to save us through his salvific blood having to be shed for us to save us. Rather Jesus came to demonstrate and impart to us the knowledge of the power within us, the empowerment through *dunamis*³⁸ the raw erotic power of divine love. It is in this imparting of knowledge to the female child that she will be empowered. Heyward's Christology will help to form the basis of a new look at sensuality/sexuality/spirituality as energy and its power to transform.

Theology gives women another way to reflect on the divine. It focuses on re-claiming the embodiment of the Goddess and is another avenue that enables female becoming. This has become another way of re-claiming the divine for women's empowerment. However I am suggesting that the Christology and understanding of incarnation developed by Heyward and Isherwood can provide the basis for a Christian reclaiming of female empowerment in sexuality and spirituality and the sensual body. This avoids in my view the over-romanticisation of reclaiming a distant past since it is a lived experience in the bodies of girls in the present that is important here.

In order to speak of bodies to the female child in a positive way we need to incorporate celebratory stories of difference within our female enfleshment rather than continuing to engage with the denigration of past patriarchal definitions of female flesh, opening the way to engage with how interconnected their bodies are within a larger cosmological picture in a life giving way. If this is not recognised then what hope do we have for the future female child? Body theology through its critical analysis relocates us as a marginalised group sending us back into our bodies. And it helps us to work through the toxic layers of the multiple oppressions that have been taken into our internal worlds, showing that our stories begin in the body. This echoes a connection with my paintings in the introduction with my own embodied experience, because my paintings tell the story of that toxicity and oppression.

Isherwood's *Fat Jesus* looks at body politics in the light of how Christianity and society has and still does view female bodies. Isherwood reminds us that 'the body of Christ takes on

³⁷ Carter Heyward, *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers 1989), p.190.

³⁸ Heyward, 1982, *op.cit.*, p.45.

all species, shapes, sizes, genders and ages if it is truly incarnational'.³⁹ I would add that a deliberate call to recognise the female child is needed so she may join in the spiralling incarnational dance of relationality as part of her developmental process. Isherwood's work based as it is in enfleshed incarnation also opens the way for speaking the divine through women's bodies which is important for girls to hear because of the deeply ingrained patriarchal myth that God is male and that male is still more important than female. Under this mythology woman becomes objectified as the other and unrecognised as a valued subject within the social-political arena, which is a strong negative message for the female child. Heyward gives back the power to the body through *dunamis* which is an important focus in my work for the female child, for she must not be afraid of the raw erotic power of the divine which is innate and is part of her sexual, sensual nature and is integral to the spiritual. It is this message which counters the negativity of the patriarchal myth. It is the Christology of Isherwood and Heyward that enables my work on the female child since it gives her embodied agency grounded in *dunamis* which is shared by the whole of creation.

It is through Mary Daly's work in which she proudly declares herself a plundering pirate⁴⁰ re-claiming structures and systems men have stolen from women. This concerns women's gynaecological bodily functions, the caretaking of children and women's full humanity on multiple levels within society. So with her method I will plunder the texts of history and the stories of today that continue to define and imprison the female child. My art reflects the suffocating, oppressive effect this male constraint has had and still has on bodies. Daly's work plays an important part of assuring agency and autonomy in the female child by smashing the looking glass society⁴¹ mirror that she talks about, which shows the female reflecting the male back to himself. We can instead rediscover the reflective value of ourselves as women and female children.

Feminist liberation theology of course is not without its critics and indeed it may well be seen to have weaknesses. For example it has to guard against universalising woman's experience because of the diverse ways of being woman. A womanist critique of feminist liberation theology⁴² is that their oppression as women of colour is multiple and that feminist liberation theologies cannot speak for them, because white women were part of the colonising

³⁹ See Lisa Isherwood, *The Fat Jesus: Feminist Explorations in Boundaries and Transgressions* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 2008), pp.134-144; Isherwood, 1999, *op.cit.*, pp.20-21., also Carter Heyward, *Keep Your Courage: A Radical Christian Feminist Speaks* (London: SCM Press, 2010), pp.111-121.

⁴⁰ Mary Daly, *Outercourse: The Bedazzling Voyage* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), pp.129-133.

⁴¹ Mary Daly, 'The Looking Glass Society', in Anne Loades, *Feminist Theology: A Reader* (London: SPCK, 1990), Ch.16, pp.189-193.

⁴² Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley California, The Crossing Press, 1984).

history of white oppression in the past and the normalising of whiteness in the present. Linda Hogan suggests that within its theory and praxis feminist theology needs to look for a collective common ground within the diverse context and unfolding experience of what it is to be woman on the planet. Enabling and empowering women can give space for women to be heard and seen,⁴³ so that in really hearing those stories we can glean wisdom from them to weave a new story of diverse complexity replacing the monological narrative of patriarchy. The wisdom that can be found in our foremothers stories is a rich, resonating, resource for the female child's liberative praxis. Through seeing how her own story may have developed within the theological and historically diverse landscape of a patriarchally oppressive meta narrative, she may begin to challenge its multiple oppressions. This complex story of historical oppression cannot yet be forgotten if the female child is to be equipped for the world in which these tendrils of oppression still strangle the fullness of becoming women.

One of the main criticisms traditional theologies have made of feminist liberation theology is that its theoretical arguments and praxis are always informed by the context and experience of the subject. This is the method of action research as well as feminist liberation theology and in relation to the former it has been considered a scholarly theoretical approach. Therefore feminist liberation theology can also be understood as using a tried and trusted research methodology. However, for those who develop their theology from an unchanging monotheistic God this is of course an untenable starting point, context cannot be all and rather tradition and text should take the upper hand. The counter argument is that both text and tradition have been developed from experience, but historically this experience at the core has been that of men. This argument of course carries no weight with those who view scripture as dictated by the hand of God. A point often overlooked by those who wish to claim that feminist theology is based purely in personal experience is that for feminists the personal is political and this assumes a very public engagement in its creation. Networking across very varied contexts adds strength to the method as it does not allow for a small self-referential group to create theology for the world at large. The paintings that are illustrated in the introduction signify this personal/political motif because of their experiential value, their symbolism also creates a language that enables the feminine to speak and therefore can be included in the ongoing theological debate of divine incarnation. Art in its many forms is another way of speaking and legitimately falls into orthopraxis because of its relational quality between performer and witness that informs, moves, reflects and motivates. Art is subjective both in its creation and its observation and it is this openness to diverse interpretation that makes it a powerful form of creative actualisation, enabling multiple theological voices to

⁴³ Morton, *op.cit.*, p.5.

emerge. It is in this understanding that I see art and feminist theology fitting together as a way of enabling female becoming for the female child as it has been for me.

A further criticism is directed at the seeming precarious openness of the methodology to a cross pollination with other disciplines. Traditional theology has been slow to engage with other disciplines perhaps believing that it makes its truths impure by so doing. However feminist theology, like liberation theology sees as its business changing the world and so needs to understand from as many perspectives as possible how people and the world actually function. An example of this can be seen in the different approaches to sin. Traditional theology has preferred to understand sin as a personal weakness which certainly has in many cases public effects but essentially is situated in the person. Feminist liberation theology while not overlooking personal responsibility also understands sin as a social and public/political matter which needs socio-political inquiry in order to begin its unravelling. In this case, liberation theology has engaged with economics, political theory, social theory and business ethics amongst other disciplines, in order to gain an understanding of how systems have been created and how they function. With this knowledge in hand they have then placed the universal love of God and a preferential option for the poor at the heart of their reformulations of politically and economically oppressive systems and structures. In my work in feminist liberation theology I engage with the unfolding process of the new cosmology, somatics, trauma theory, and theories of childhood, in order to reclaim the divine subjectivity of those lost in male dominated theological structures. In this way I intend to develop and reformulate a theology of female childhood.

As with any method feminist liberation theology has its own way of looking at matters which will inevitably produce certain ways of questioning and therefore certain bodies of answers. This is true of any method but unlike some other methods, feminist liberation theology does not see what it produces as the last word but rather as an opening up of hitherto ignored or marginalised experiences which contain within them human/divine potentiality. Feminist liberation theology covering as it does body theology, eco and cosmological theologies and providing a hermeneutic which allows for suspicion and creative actualisation is the best method for the work I wish to carry out. I will remain alert to its pitfalls as well as delighting in its strengths.

Section 1: The Sexual Child in Christian Thought

Theology is a sexual act and indecent. Theologians are called to be sexual performers of a committed praxis of social justice and transformation of the structures of economic and sexual oppression in their societies.¹

...in the midst of reflection about their bodies and relationships girls might come to articulate an awareness that God is a part of our nature as sexual beings, and not standing in judgement of it, as many portrayals of Christianity would lead them to believe.²

My journey as a Christian, mother, grandmother, feminist liberation theologian and artist has awoken me to question the way Christianity has looked at children. The lack of engagement with the possibilities of children's sexuality seems to have been how theology has historically proceeded. Even today the sexuality of a child is kept in the background on a shelf labelled taboo. It is rather curious to me that we should still be afraid of talking positively about the child's sexual body in the twenty first century. Although of course with the many stories of abuse that we hear on a daily basis it is understandable that adults are cautious when talking about the sexuality of children.

Understanding Sexual/Sensual Meaning for Girls

As a society we need to acknowledge that there is much fear and shame about bodies. These fears are then projected onto the child, who in turn, can often be seen to play these projections out in ways that are challenging. Society holds the responsibility of encouraging and nurturing the child to fullness of life, which includes, teaching children not be afraid or ashamed of their bodies. Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley write 'Childhood is afforded a modicum of queerness when people worry more about how the child turns out rather than thinking about how the child exists as a child'.³ It is a complex business when dealing with these human issues regarding children. This question raises its head time and time again about how a child lives as a child. The deeper issues of childhood then become over simplified with little if any acknowledgement of difference, where the concept of child and childhoods end up existing collectively under the name of children. Furthermore, up until fairly recently the child was still being addressed through the male gender, thus eliminating any thought around difference between sexuality or gender. Leaving heterosexuality as the normative umbrella,

¹ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex Gender and Politics* (London: Routledge. 2000), p. 89.

² Baker, *op.cit.*, p.87.

³ Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley, (eds.), *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2004), p.ix.

under which is hidden a whole host of issues regarding children's difference and need. Society takes this normative reality as the only safe option, but for whom and why? Issues around gender and sexuality are rarely discussed in terms of power dynamics and diversity and it does appear that much of patriarchy's age old trappings are still in place in these areas. One of the most historically Christian ideas is that our sexuality is a mechanistic act for procreation. I argue within this thesis that human sexuality is grounded in our sensuality and has a greater part to play in who we are, in other creative ways beyond the mechanistic. However female children are still groomed to be future child bearers and reflective props for the power driven male. Procreation and male pleasure it seems are central within the sexually active arena forgetting therefore, that sexual pleasure can be a sensually charged experience which holds the potential to be the power centre for all human beings. My own embodied experience portrayed through my art gives me an understanding of what Heyward means when she says that

Sensuality is a foundation for our authority...Our feelings are evoked and strengthened sensually by touching, tasting, hearing, seeing and smelling with one another. Our senses and the feelings that are generated by them become primary spiritual resources. In knowing one another through our senses, feelings and intelligence – and intuition is a form of intelligence – we come to know God.⁴

Yet patriarchy has placed the sensual nature of women in an area of aspiritual and in the lower level of humanity and within nature, which, is situated alongside other lower natured beings including children and animals. This notion will have been added to a legacy, which is detrimental to the developing female child. The inciting of fear, sanctioning shame and dumbing down this vital component of sensuality excludes the vitality of female active expression of passion, power and pleasure. This in turn leads to unequal relationships and so reduces the visibility and value of female activity in the world. For feminists, the personal is also political where private and public acts cannot be easily separated. So when I talk of our sexuality it is within an understanding of our broader sensuality which, as Heyward says, is the seat of our authority. As adults we need to be aware of the child's exploratory journey of sexually embodied awareness which needs to be respected and nurtured. For this reason I propose the idea that masturbation for girls might be considered as a sacramental act⁵ as part of the nurturing process as she discovers her own sexual pleasure which is relationally important to her. This is her grounded beginning, giving her knowledge of herself that will

⁴ Heyward, 1989, *op.cit.*, pp.93-94.

⁵ The notion that masturbation for girls might be considered as a 'Sacramental Act' and as part of their educational development for their sexual/spiritual lives is important. This is a concept which evolved from a conversation between Professor Isherwood and myself during a tutorial, this was a suggestion made by Prof. Isherwood with which I could see the potential benefits and was noted by me in 2008.

sustain and equip her for life and relationship with the other. The patriarchal structures of the Church have eliminated positive female development from this starting point because pleasure of the flesh is seen to be sinful. Here I would remind the reader that the six therapeutic paintings born out of my experience in the introduction, illustrate this entrapment of the female embodied sensual/sexual/spiritual experience within that same patriarchal ideology and action.

There are multiple and complex problems created because of our lack of understanding of the link between embodied sensuality and sexuality and we ignore it at our peril. This overall dysfunctional reality on all relational levels can be seen through how we engage with the rest of creation, which should remind us of our destructive mindset. How well we connect with each other and other created beings are also an important reality and to do so we need to have sensual awareness. The greatest influence and the main stunting agent in how we begin to relate in the world, I would argue, are deeply embedded in the ideological mechanics of heteronormativity. This is the mechanical ideology that the female child continues to be groomed in as a number of social researchers have shown. Isherwood tells us that,

Despite the volumes of academic writing on the subject of power inequality in sexual relationships it is still tempting to assert young women of today are daughters of feminist mothers and are not playing the same old tune. It's a nice thought, but it does not appear to be true.⁶

She further states that because of this and other issues, '*The Male in the Head*' was a depressing read'.⁷ This is a report on a ten year study across four UK locations which questioned and analysed the sexual behaviour of young women aged 16-23. It documents the rise in STD's in both female and male including HIV and also unwanted pregnancies, which demonstrates that 'the younger generation show an inability to heed the experiences of past generations'.⁸ More worryingly it also demonstrates how young women on the whole still appear to be objects in a male defined set of sexual events, that is to say they still have to get it right for boys and the understanding of sex itself is defined and dictated by the male body. Many of the girls questioned felt powerless and from an early age learnt to play the game of serving male pleasure, often at the expense of their own feelings of self-worth. It cannot help be noticed that even at this fundamental level of human being, taking care of bodies is not heeded and cycles are no nearer to being broken. This is not only because of the way sexual

⁶ Lisa Isherwood, *The Power of Erotic Celibacy: Queering Heteropatriarchy* (London, New York: T&T Clark, 2006), p.11.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ Janet Holland, Caroline Ramazanoglu, Sue Sharpe and Rachael Thompson *The Male InThe Head: Young People Heterosexuality and Power* (London: Tufnell Press, 2004), pp.1-2.

power relations have to be negotiated within male defined spaces of social political practice, but because of masculinity itself which it seems is the dominating factor.⁹ All of which I would argue impact on embodied sexual, spiritual lives. Whilst it is hard to separate the two elements of sexuality and spirituality this section is about Christian approaches to sexuality where I will be questioning whether even the most radical sexual theologies have addressed the needs of girls.

Sexual Theology Beginning With Jesus

Would it be an inappropriate starting point then to ask questions about Jesus' sexuality after all it is his life that the Christian faith is built upon? Dale B. Martin says that 'most people have come to believe what biblical scholars have assumed are the right answers about Jesus' singleness and sexuality in the light of later doctrinal development but may have no basis in fact'.¹⁰ This suggestion, he argues, could create a response from most traditional Christians, perhaps of 'embarrassment, vulgarity, imprudence or even produce a cry of blasphemy'¹¹ while to others 'in our culture it could possibly be considered on one hand a bit radical or on the other a bit impolite to ask Jesus about his sex life.'¹² Martin addresses this question not because he is interested in Jesus' sexuality per se, but because he is interested in how sexuality is projected onto Jesus through various imaginative scenarios and 'how his sexual or asexual life and relationships have been interpreted'.¹³ Martin brings to our attention the importance of imagination and the role it plays in our interpretation of things we 'perceive to be truths',¹⁴ particularly in biblical text. It is in this imaginative light that both secular and Christian sexual interpretive truths must begin. By addressing the male sexuality of Jesus I am not suggesting that this can speak for the female child's sexuality. Nevertheless, I think it is relevant to bring his sexuality out of the closet because the assumption of Jesus' asexuality has been held as the model for Christian males as a way to enable them to achieve spiritual wholeness. The flip side of this being that women and sexuality are denigrated to a negative location and are seen as lacking in divine and spiritual substance, which may take a long time to locate and recover. This process of location, naming and recovery can be seen illustrated within my paintings. These earlier images in my work, demonstrate that this negative way of thinking of the feminine is breathed deeply into the body and becomes an imprinted way of life unless educated otherwise. Educating our embodied selves otherwise allows us to see and do life

⁹ *op.cit.*, pp.5-6.

¹⁰ Dale B. Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox press, 2006), p.92.

¹¹ *op.cit.*, p.94.

¹² *op.cit.*, p.97.

¹³ *op.cit.*, p.101.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

differently. Our awakening consciousness allows these impacted experiences to resurface, which, can then raise the opportunity to be channelled creatively through art. My experiential story through art powerfully portrays this. Feminist theologians have critiqued patriarchy in relation to women but have not done any work directly on girls. It is here that the re-imaging of female sexuality and pleasure in relation to the female child remains crucial. The hope is that the incarnational value of embodied sexual wholeness that is being demonstrated in relation to women may also be inclusive to the female child. Painting, as I have experienced, is one of many creative mediums that can be a mode of transition and transformation in the lives of women. It can help them to understand themselves in their bodies, in relation to the world and raise awareness of unequal power relations within patriarchy. This needs to be encouraged and actioned theologically in Christian church communities as a praxis of girlhood. The painting that opens the introduction is that of a Child Christa, the crucified Christ is present in this image because within Christological thinking, everything we experience at a human level is also experienced in the divine. It was this child's sexual/spiritually charged experience that confronted me as an adult.

Dualism, Heteronormativity, Consumerism, Girlhood and the Danger Within

Although Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is not a theologian of sexuality she engages in the missing presence and voices of women, which must be embodied. She says, 'Western, andocentric linguistic and scientific structures define women as secondary to men and thus as insignificant in the making of human culture, religion and history'.¹⁵ Although her work is not child centred she opens the door for possible dialogue. This is a crucial starting point because not only is she addressing the loss of voice but also the physical absence of women within the theological narratives of biblical texts. This history has taken its toll on women and the children they raise. Rosemary Radford Ruether suggests that women's willingness to conform to patriarchal values begins in girlhood. She tells one such story of her experience of motherhood in relation to a conversation heard between her daughter and her daughter's friend. The daughter's friend says to her daughter, 'We are becoming ladies now. We can no longer shout and play with the boys in the street. My daughter appeared silently to concur. I can remember being astonished at how this socialisation into gender conformity was being inculcated by one eleven year old girl to another'.¹⁶ This is another part of the spectrum of grooming, the seeds of which are planted early and are deeply woven into a certain pattern of behaviour. It is important to bring to attention this legacy that has been born out of this marginalised position of women through the gendered dualism of sexuality and spirituality.

¹⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983, *op.cit.*, p.28.

¹⁶ Ruether in Baker, *op.cit.*, p.vii.

This elemental split has become the model that Christianity and secular moral values are based on and grounded in. These values have become an institutionalised legacy¹⁷ that we educate our children in and it is a model that we still at a crucial level find hard to evolve from. Whilst we remain contained in these binary opposites of sexuality/spirituality, male/female, good/evil, right/wrong, we will continue to feed and perpetuate heteronormative values.

Heteronormativity goes beyond the practice of heterosexuality and pervades all civil society with an assumption that normative being is male. This limited model of being human becomes toxic through stagnation, or as Mary Daly calls it, 'Stag-Nation', she uses this word Stag-Nation which is derived from stagnate to denote the masculine within patriarchal constructs that hold women in their place with its state of control. She says 'The Stable owners of Stag-Nation – hierarchical opportunists – hustle their services, attempting to hustle/hinge women to their fraudulent frameworks, framing their prey. The framers thus work to fix women, to bolt the doors of our souls, ourselves'.¹⁸ This analogy fixes this legacy with a frightening reality, one that all women need to wake up to, for the sake of the future girl child.

Bodies are contained in their difference within a hierarchical state. With this containment any movement toward a transformative process is halted. Transformation is an important process for transcending into another way of thinking and being in the world, change of mindset is enabled through a transformative process and relational consciousness.¹⁹ This change of mindset is much needed in a world that is slowly destroying itself through how it thinks, acts and relates, particularly in the west. By engaging with that process we can perhaps move towards redressing the balance of unequal power relations that dualistic thinking and practice has encouraged between gender differences. This is crucial in relation to the female child because that imbalance of power has not served women or the planet well in terms of realising their full humanity and creative potential. The female child is our future woman and whilst we continue to maintain that disservice we will continue to jeopardise the future flourishing of the female half of the human race. In this first step of my thesis I am looking for theological rays of hope in what is taught about sexuality or what is not and what we understand about this concept regarding children. Then perhaps we can find a thread that will lead us to a space where we may begin to embrace agency, autonomy and most important of all subjectivity for the female child. I realise and understand through my own experience that agency, autonomy and subjectivity are crucial to the future flourishing of the female

¹⁷ Holland, Ranazonogla, Sharpe and Thompson, *op.cit.*, pp.156-174.

¹⁸ Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1985). p. xxvii.

¹⁹ Catherine Keller, 'Tangles of Unknowing: Cosmology, Christianity and Climate', in Lisa Isherwood and Elaine Bellchambers, (eds.), *Through Us, With Us, In Us: Relational Theologies in the Twenty-First Century* (London: SCM Press, 2010), Ch.6, pp.109-120.

child's self-esteem in the developmental process of her becoming an adult. The link I am making with my artwork is not only the interconnectivity of everything within the cosmos but also the embodied effect patriarchy has on the female body as seen in the figurative paintings in the introduction, which I will continue to demonstrate as we unfold the evidence. In this section it is the patriarchal assault on female sexuality whose impact continues to be experienced by generations of women.

I do not wish to dwell on the history of our dualist system, as it is the possibilities within current theological Christianity which interest me most, but some mention is necessary in order to set the scene and understand the constraints that lurk in theological corners. The Christian faith has its fundamental starting point in the proclamation that, 'The Word became flesh' and further that this event made visible in Jesus, the Christ, was the cornerstone of the salvation of all humankind. The potentially world changing implications of this proclamation have in the view of liberation and feminist theologies gradually been lost through time under the weight of misogynistic thought perpetuated by many of the early Church Fathers. Two of which were Tertullian who thought that woman needed to be reminded that 'they might be Eve and further that they were the Devils gateway'²⁰ and Augustine who included in his thinking on women, that they were created purely for procreation and nothing else.²¹ These ideologies have been carried down through the centuries. This way of thinking I would argue, led to the development of doctrine which makes the male the 'signifier'²² therefore privileging his gender in order of the 'symbolic' by the exclusion of the feminine whose gender becomes the 'semiotic'²³ the other. The Church Fathers understood Jesus' flesh to be free from human desire which in its weakness was made manifest in the female flesh in every way. According to Origen women were weak in their flesh and were considered by him 'worse than animals because of their insatiable lust'.²⁴ So here Jesus alone was the divine filled flesh and it was this teaching that sanitised into existence the heteropatriarchal order. The metaphysical which implied that removing oneself from bodily sensations was the only way to connect to God, whilst we as humans remain in the flesh and women even more so because of Eve, could not attain perfection. It is hard to believe that this is still so readily accepted as a teaching by many women today. This notion slowly began to be interpreted and declared by the early Church Fathers as a new way of being, which turned out to be so disconnected, disembodied and exclusive. If we are truly to include the representation of women, children and other

²⁰ A. Cleveland Coxe (ed.) *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), p.12.

²¹ Uta Ranke-Heineman, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven: Women, Sexuality and the Catholic Church*, Peter Heinemann, (trans.) (London: Doubleday, 199), p.77.

²² Kristeva, *op.cit.*, p.79.

²³ *op.cit.*, pp.80-81.

²⁴ Brown, *op.cit.*, pp.51-2.

marginalised groups then we need to move away from the sanitised flesh of Christ to the embodied incarnate Jesus. We also need to reclaim jouissance²⁵ back into the language of the body. This feminine part of language also places within it the vitality and value of women's empowerment and creativity, by allowing her to speak her authority through art, poetry and performance in its many expressive forms.

James Nelson as a body theologian attempts to put the jouissance back into theology. He speaks of the seven deadly sins within Christian declarations about sexuality, which, he sees as originating in Christianity's inherent dualism. He says they are, deadly because they can cause lack of quality of life limiting people to heteronormative and spiritually/sexually bereft lives and exclusion

...the first deadly sin, with its counterpart, sexist or patriarchal dualism...Any dualism is the radical breaking apart of two elements that essentially belong together, a rupture which sees the two coexisting in uneasy truce or in open warfare.²⁶

The other six deadly sins he talks about include sexism within patriarchy, heteronormative performance which excludes other possibilities for sexual orientation, guilt over self-love especially for women who are encouraged to sacrifice themselves for family, legalism within sexual ethics, sexless spirituality within the body of Christ and privatisation of sexuality. Nelson describes this as literally reducing the sexual performance down to the genital area 'the privates'.²⁷ These seven deadly sins have led us to understand ourselves and others in their diversity. The result of which splits bodies of people within and between themselves, driving them to the margins of society through the heteropatriarchal structures that some bodies cannot live within. Therefore creating bodies who are labelled as freaks, strange, even queer and in this they are treated unjustly and inhumanely. The definitive construct of women and female children born out of these roots of patriarchy, have created a huge distortion of how both women and female children experience themselves in their bodies. From the sickness of eating disorders in women which Lisa Isherwood suggests is caused by abuse sexual and otherwise 'that is to say the abuse of attacking a person in their body with preconceived ideas and ideals and reinforcing these ideas through cultural actions and requirements',²⁸ to the way both groups perform in this cultural defined space. Isherwood calls this a blasphemous act against the incarnational value of the divine/human²⁹ connection, and so is an attack on the sensuality and connective value of women. The distortion of female fleshly image has for a

²⁵ Kristeva, *op.cit.*, p.80.

²⁶ *op.cit.*, p.83.

²⁷ Nelson, 1992, *op.cit.*, p.38.

²⁸ Isherwood, 2008, *op.cit.*, p.25.

²⁹ *ibid.*

long time leaked into the arena of young girls' whose development has been hugely sexualised negatively in an adult way. This seduction manifests within the market place and through the huge diverse resources of the media that is made readily available to everyone.

Consequentially this has produced a sexualisation of young girls, which has reached disproportionate levels. M.G. Durham says 'the turn of the millennium has spawned an intriguing phenomenon, the sexy little girl'.³⁰ This is the young child who has been sexualised by the western market in order to sell goods within a society that at the same time is extremely concerned about paedophilia. Christianity does not to date seem able to speak positively about a healthy and autonomous creative sexuality in the young and so does not contribute in a constructive way to the debate about this new phenomena which does need a clear critique. In secularist society however the sexualisation of the female body including the female child's has reached disproportionate levels of attention. The fashion world and the masculinised heteronormative gaze dictates how women and the female child should dress in order to 'feel like a real woman, feminine, a princess, a hot chick and sex kitten'.³¹ This is a projection of sexual ideals grown out of 'voyeurism' rather than a sexuality that calls for mutuality in relationship. This is to be considered with whoever we are relating to or what, in terms of living and sharing co-creatively and out of love, as Heyward suggests

To love you is to make love to you/with you, whether in an exchange of glances heavy with existence, in the passing of peace we mean, in common work or play, in our struggle for social justice or in the ecstasy and tenderness of embrace which we believe is just and right for us and others in the world.³²

How the media and the fashion world view the female child's body leaves a question in my mind. This is how conscious adults are of their own contribution to this voyeuristic phenomenon. Feminist liberation theologians and other feminist theorists locate the male gaze as subliminally responsible for this and furthermore I would suggest this infiltrates the psyches of both women and men. I agree with Durham in her questioning of this phenomenon when she tells us that

Perhaps one reason for our fascination with the sexy little girl is her tricky double role in society – she is simultaneously a symbol of female empowerment and the embodiment of a chauvinistic "beauty myth." She invokes the specter of paedophilia while kindling the prospect of potent female sexuality. "If you've got it flaunt it" we urge, while at the same time we decry the absurd and capricious standards of femininity that dismantle women's lives.³³

³⁰ M.G Durham, *The Lolita Effect* (London, New York: Duckworth Overlook, 2009), p.24.

³¹ Ed Mayo and Agnes Nairn, *Consumer Kids: How Big Business Is Grooming Our Children For Profit* (London: Constable and Robinson Ltd, 2009), p.57.

³² Heyward, 1982, *op.cit.*, p.225.

³³ Durham, *op.cit.*, p.24.

The position of women's dismantled embodied lives is at the heart of the feminist liberation theological debate, informing their stories that have more often than not been seeded in girlhood. This is also my lived experience that had been tolerated at many levels of violation and oppression, which I have expressed through my early art work, making them an important visual reminder for this work and for whoever reads it, because however we treat the body it will always remember.

Durham seriously and thoroughly investigates this phenomenon with great trepidation as she walks through the potential minefield of a toxic world of sexual exploitation of our young girls which is made manifest through consumerism and the media. She takes seriously the healthy development of sexuality and desire in young girls lives and recognises the need for this to become a lived embodied reality that favours self-esteem and value. It seems to me difficult for us as a society to see a way forward to be able to readdress the balance of power within these difficult tensions. Tensions created within phallocentric leadership the consequence of which has had a negative effect on bodies. The leadership of words and actions of patriarchy have acted like a battering ram throughout theological history, battering people out of existence quite literally. At this point I would like to remind the reader that children were not even considered within this historical arena, they were invisible and only made visible within the constraints of 'patriarchal possession'.³⁴

Nelson reminds us that that our theology cannot begin within Christian doctrine alone, although he does say that our insight may later be informed by it. I am not altogether convinced by this, because the male interpretations of scripture that have created these doctrines have been an instrument of control over so many bodies throughout history and especially the bodies of women. First and foremost theology needs to be acknowledged as being located in the experience of our bodies starting with, Nelson says

The fleshly experience of life – with our hunger and our passions, our bodily aliveness and deadness, with the smell of coffee, with the homeless and the hungry we see on the streets, with the warm touch of a friend, with bodies violated and torn apart in war, with the scent of honeysuckle or the soft sting of autumn air on the cheek, with bodies tortured and raped, with the body-self making love with the beloved and lovemaking with the earth.³⁵

It is in this statement that we are reminded of the paradox within human lived experience that uses control of earth that creates dualism and the paradoxical stuff of nature that we cannot control within the bigger picture of the cosmos. Nelson has contributed a lot towards raising

³⁴ William L. Countrymen, *Dirt Greed and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and their Implications for Today* (London: SCM Press Ltd. 1988), Ch. 8. pp.131-149.

³⁵ Nelson, 1992, *op.cit.*, pp. 42-3.

awareness within contemporary masculinities by addressing the issues surrounding phallocentric domination within Christianity. This however raises two questions for me, one, does his research dive deep enough within the multi-oppressive realm of women in their struggle for liberation? Two, can we glean anything as a legacy from his research on dualism toward a holistic viewpoint of the sexuality of the female child?

Nelson does not include children in his work, but the basis for embodiment is there and he is a liberation theologian not a feminist theologian and neither does he claim to be. His work does however open a space to commence a dialogical connection with feminist issues which hold a theological possibility of inclusion for the female child.

Although the subject of the child is not directly addressed in Isherwood's body theology of liberation, the possibilities and potential are there because as in the work of Schüssler Fiorenza it addresses women's embodied experience both in theological history and in the present. Isherwood enlarges her theological tent with an intention to include every act of injustice committed against all embodied human experience by patriarchy. This I would argue could include acts against the sexuality of the female child in her fleshly embodied life and all that is imprinted and projected upon it through those actions. As I have illustrated through my art work in Figures 1-7 in the introduction, that all experience impacts on our sensual body from our early beginnings. The body needs and longs for something other and relational to survive and is open to everything, within the flesh dwells the divine that encompasses all of life including the sexual realm. We don't necessarily celebrate the fleshly life of the female child fully in a positive way so maybe we can begin to here. Isherwood celebrates women's divine flesh saying that 'The reign of God is a warm fleshy, all-encompassing body with enough spare flesh for all to be nourished'.³⁶ Although woman's experience is not necessarily the female child's experience, there are correlations because of the very nature of being female. In this we need to remember that heteronormative patriarchal values are still the main menu of the day; dishing out its main courses of dictatorial rights over female sexualised flesh, and ordering her place in this realm, in which Isherwood tell us is 'The battle against female flesh is in so many ways a battle against nature itself...is a familiar ground to feminist theologians who long ago identified the dualisms of the Fathers as the ground that diminishes us, in this case literally'.³⁷

The residue of this battle feeds consumerism within the public market place and grows it in another way. This is also extended to the private sector and NHS medical practice and in what we do or do not nutritionally put into our bodies which involves, 'Millions of women

³⁶ Isherwood, 2008, *op.cit.*, p.2.

³⁷ *op.cit.*, p.12.

(who) are affected by eating disorders of various kinds and few women are comfortable with food, eating and size'.³⁸ This does not encourage the flourishing of women in an embodied spirituality and only further serves to suit the male thought and gaze. Another course to this toxic menu is, if you don't fit any more because you are too fat or too old, or both, as a woman you can become either invisible or outrageous and seem mad. However, many women are left wondering what their role was and is as a human being in the bigger picture of society. Catherine Keller tells us that in seeking a self, women in their search for empowerment at this changing point in their lives 'desire not less but more (and different) relation; not disconnection, but connection that counts.'³⁹ This is a continued sexual embodiment that realises the potential of new ways of being that are crammed full with vital references of experience and wisdom. However these are not valued because of women's devalued position in society and the generational void. Isherwood's work runs quite deep as far as woman's experience goes, including those who are erotically celibate⁴⁰ which is as much about sexuality than not. The female child can also be as erotically charged creative and passionate about life, dreams and futures. Isherwood's inclusivity does not yet run deep enough to include the child within radical sexual theologies while traditional theologies still struggle to speak about sexuality in a positive light. Feminist liberation theologies have neglected this area of research for far too long. Adults do not just suddenly materialize as grownups in their sexual experience, therefore the unfolding nature of children's subjectivity, gender and sexuality needs investigation. This again indicates to me that this is a timely opportunity to investigate it.

An Encounter with Mysticism

Of course Christianity is a diverse set of cultures and traditions and with even the mainstream there have been dissenting voices with regard to human sexuality. For example, if we look back to the 14th-century Julian of Norwich affirmed that 'our sensuality is grounded in nature, in compassion, and in grace. In our sensuality God is'.⁴¹ This struck me as being as much about sexuality because of its interconnective nature with the sensual which we embody as human beings. Just reading briefly about what these mystics felt, experienced and spoke of in terms of what was for them divine relational value impacted on me and echoed what I was saying in my art about my own experience. This revealed within me an understanding that there was no separation of the sensual/sexual nature that is also spiritual, it seemed to me a fluid

³⁸ *op.cit.*, p.25.

³⁹ Catherine Keller, *From a Broken Web: Separation Sexism and Self* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), p.3.

⁴⁰ Isherwood, 2006, *op.cit.*, p.1.

⁴¹ Julian of Norwich quoted in Marvin Ellison 'Sexuality and Spirituality: An Intimate-and Intimidating-Connection', in Elizabeth Stuart and Adrian Thatcher, *Christian Perspectives on Sexuality and Gender*. (Leominster: Grace wing Publishers, 1996), Ch.5.2, pp.220-228.

continuum of all that was and is, and is to come. So to escape the material body in search of the divine was a misunderstanding. Christian history reveals other mystics similar to Julian, both women and men who connected the erotic to their faith filled daily lives. These were, it could be argued, diverse ways of erotic embodied living with the divine by reading the Bible, performing the sacraments and enjoying intimacy with God. Grace Jantzen tells us that

'Mystical Theology and the Erotic Other' The understanding that the mystical, spiritual meaning of scripture, both revealed and concealed in its words, have parallels in other aspects of the church's practice in the medieval period which enable us to discern further shifts in the notion of the mystical. Just as Christ could be encountered in the sacred page by those able to discern mystical meaning, (which were not women) so also it was held, Christ could be encountered in the sacraments. The Bread and the wine, like the words of scripture, both reveal the divine reality. The same was true of the waters of baptism: as the words of the Bible contain a mystical meaning, so the waters of baptism are for those who discern, the mystical waters of new birth, as the bread and the wine of the Eucharist are the mystical body and blood of Christ. At this point it was realised theology needed to be extended.⁴²

It was not just women who engaged with the erotic in their spiritual lives. Bernard of Clairvaux uses the erotic imagery of the Song of Songs as the basis of his understanding of union and intimacy with God. His interpretation of this biblical narrative was about Christ as a 'nurturing mother'⁴³ speaking to the soul. 'No sweeter names can be found to embody the sweet interflow of affections between the word and the soul...'⁴⁴ Through the three kisses Jantzen shows us how Bernard developed a mystical relationship with Christ

In the dawn you brought me proof of your love, as in my first approach to kiss your revered feet you forgave my evil ways as I lay in the dust. With the advancement of the day you gave your servant reason to rejoice when in the kiss of the hand you imparted the grace to live rightly. And now what remains, O Good Jesus, except that suffused as I am with the fullness of your light, and while my spirit is fervent, you would graciously bestow on me the kiss of your mouth, and give me unbounded in your presence.⁴⁵

To Bernard this was a movement toward intimate union with God, (The movement is upward from foot to head,) within that process are three steps (kisses) to the third intimate kiss on the mouth of Christ. As opposed to the intellectual delivery given by Origen and Dionysius who defined these three stages of the mystical path as purgation, illumination and union. Jantzen says that, although the language is charged with an erotic yearning for sexual consummation with the beloved, it is purely spiritual and totally removed from bodiliness. However English

⁴² Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Press 1995), pp.86-87.

⁴³ Richard Rambuss, *Closet Devotions* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 148-149.

⁴⁴ Jantzen, *op.cit.*, p.127.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

literature scholar Richard Rambuss suggests otherwise, showing Bernard as quite queer, as he transgresses the boundaries of homoerotic yearnings which Rambuss argues 'was common within male mystics' closeted lives'.⁴⁶ The expression of which can be found within the homoerotic poetry of seventeenth century poet George Herbert who sexually feminises Christ's body turning it into a somatically flowing body of vulnerability, which is both 'erotically charged but retains Christ's masculinity'.⁴⁷ A link is made here I would argue with the feminised body of Christ that Bernard refers to in the Song of Songs. Herbert's poetry maintains male sexuality allowing the reader to see the ambiguity of its homoerotic leanings. Bernard's reflections on the biblical text show explicitly that he saw that 'Christ's bride is the Church who nurses us and that the bride-Church nurses from Christ who is also a mother and that this motherly body is all of us,'⁴⁸ further suggesting that this is who he was to his novices who entered his monastery under the auspices of his care who would probably refer to him as mother, thus showing the complexities of cloistered celibate lives.

There was a great deal of suspicion by the church, even toward those who were cloistered, because of the erotophobia so deeply engrained within its doctrines and dogmas. When we turn to a married mother we could imagine the suspicion is doubled. Margery Kempe is an interesting example in Christian history as we can find a highly sexual, erotic, non-celibate woman who brings together sexuality and spirituality. Margery Kempe termed as 'God's Wild Housewife',⁴⁹ claimed to have married God, this was not just a spiritual idea for Margery for her it was a full sexual encounter of a human/divine incarnational nature. After marrying God we hear that

...the Father took her by the hand, in her soul, before the son and the Holy Ghost; and the mother of Jesus and all the twelve apostles and Saint Margaret and many more Holy saints and holy virgins with a great multitude of angels, saying to her soul: "I take thee, Margery, for my wedded wife, for fairer for fouler, for richer, for poorer, so that thou be kindly and gentle to do as I bid. For daughter there never was a child as gracious to its mother as I shall be to thee, both in weel and in woe, to help thee and comfort thee. And thereto I make thee surety." Then the mather of God, and all the saints that were present in her soul, that they might have such joy together.⁵⁰

So Margery's marriage is far removed from the traditional mystic marriage advocated by people such as Bernard where for him it was a metaphysical encounter. Margery claimed that

⁴⁶ Rambuss, pp.103-135.

⁴⁷ *op.cit.*, p.36.

⁴⁸ *op.cit.*, p.148.

⁴⁹ Lisa Isherwood, 'Christian Mysticism', *Unpublished Lecture Notes*, 2002, pp.1-6.

⁵⁰ *op.cit.*, p.4.

she and God have kissed, caressed and consummated their marriage after which she enters into a conversation with Jesus

Therefore I must be intimate with you and lie in your bed.
Daughter you greatly desire to see me and you may boldly, when you are in bed. To you as a wedded husband, as your dear darling, and as your sweet son, for I want to be loved as a sweet son should be loved by a mother, and I want you to love me my daughter, as a good wife's right to love her husband.⁵¹

The intimacy Margery shared with God was on several relational levels, reflecting the words of Jesus in St John's gospel '...you will know that I am in my Father, and I am in you, and you in me.'⁵² Margery went on to have fourteen children before her husband granted her a celibate marriage. Margery believed that celibacy would give her freedom and a more intimate spiritual, relationship with Jesus because that could serve him better in that state.

The child does not figure within the mystical genre of this period. However in the 16th Century onwards, Hugh Cunningham writes about the prophetic nature of the child who were not erotically imagined as the adult mystics of the Middle Ages were, rather they were looked at through an adult projected lens of innocence and purity. The phenomenon of both the mystical and prophetic child occurred during the time of the Reformation where the expectation of the child were high in relation to the strict environment of the religious life they led. Cunningham mentions at least three children, 'William Withers from Suffolk, Sara Wight from London and Martha Hatfield from Yorkshire, the latter of which was named 'The Wise Virgin, all three were sat and scribed for'.⁵³ They were recorded to have spewed forth the fiery predictions of hell and damnation as God's punishment to the adults around them unless they repent, after coming out of either a trance like state or fasting. The latter refers to two girls, who Cunningham suggests today 'would have been clinically treated for eating disorders'.⁵⁴

So even within the stark dualism of Christian doctrine we do see gaps filled, by some adult figures in our theological history that evidence a sexual/sensual/spiritual connection, but not the child. This does not leave us with a totally positive picture and does indeed show that children are not included in a positive frame of reference to the nature of sexuality/spirituality and the erotic. It is really to the 20th century that we have to turn to find some glimmers of hope.

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² John 14:20.

⁵³ Cunningham *op.cit.*, pp 62-65.

⁵⁴ *op.cit.*, p.64.

Twentieth Century Theology of Sexuality

Churches within the last two or three decades have started to engage with human sexuality and seem to have come to an acceptance of sexuality as being an integral part of our spirituality. The Anglican report from Southern Africa in 1995, entitled, *The Church and Human Sexuality* observes

Spirituality is not opposed to, but includes, our sexuality, so salvation entails the process of recovering sexual wholeness, including growth in bodily self-acceptance and in the capacity of sensuousness. The awakening of the self to its destiny as an embodiment of divine love is intrinsic to the life of the spirit. Sexuality is therefore to be expressed in ways conforming to the Christian gospel of love, with the recognition of the equal value and dignity of men and women...In view of the theological understanding of human sexuality as a gift of God to enable people to attain to a fuller humanity in relationship with others, the parish church has as great a responsibility to teach its members about sexuality frankly and openly, as it has to teach other aspects of faith.⁵⁵

So what does this Church statement mean and are these just more platitudes or are we to find something positive here about the nature of sexuality? The question still appears to remain about the bodies of people who are obviously excluded because of their difference. The challenge of 'fuller humanity in relationship with others' has been offered but if we are to take it up surely it means opening up to a wider challenge of inclusion to embrace diversity such as the array of genders beyond simply two, acknowledgement of the full range of sexual orientation and sexuality, not simply within the general population but also within marginalised groups such as the physically and mentally disabled, the mentally ill, the aged and children. The equal value and dignity of many of these groups is missing within Church documents and for my purpose I am most concerned with children's equal value and dignity. Many of the above mentioned groups are considered to be asexual and so does the report imply that if this is the case then they are compromised spirituality as well. For me although there are very positive signs in this report from 1995 the reality of present day ideology demonstrates that it did not go far enough or indeed perhaps has not been taken seriously enough. But then to disregard centuries of theology where the split between sexuality and spirituality has been so deep will need much more than Church reports saying things they do not mean.

For a bigger jolt we have to dig much deeper into the theology that underpins Christian notions of who we are, who Jesus was and how his life impacts on ours. We have to get to the roots of theology and, in my view, allow lived experience to have an impact on it.

⁵⁵ Southern African Anglican Theological Commission, *The Church and Human Sexuality*, Johannesburg: CPSA Publishing Committee, 1995, pp.15-16.

We can see shifts in the work of theologians such as Heyward who proposes that we re-image redemption understood as achieved by the one and only Son of God into a co-redemptive praxis⁵⁶ including all who are endowed with dunamis as their birthright. This is the raw erotic power that pulsates through all of life and draws us out of who we are into relationship with all creation. Here we see not only a challenge to mainstream theology but the beginnings of a relational theology, one that allows for our deepest desires and strongest attractions to be part of a co-redemptive praxis. Christian teaching does understand the body as the site of God's grace because the human body is made in the image of God. Rowan Williams in his essay '*The Body's Grace*' talks about the relational value and mutual fulfilment of desire and pleasure within committed relationships he proposes that

For my body to be the cause of joy, the end of homecoming, for me, it must be there for someone else, must be perceived, accepted, nurtured. And that means being given over to the creation of joy in that other, because only being directed as the enjoyment, the happiness, of the other does it become unreservedly loveable. To desire my joy is to desire the joy of the one I desire: my search for enjoyment through the bodily presence of another is the longing to be enjoyed in my body.⁵⁷

This is poignant but can only be relational, if that other is able to know pleasure and desire in relation in coming home to her own body. If the other is woman, then the need to consider whether she is aware of her own pleasure and desire comes first. I say this because a large majority of women are assumed to be aware of their own pleasure entering into marital relationship and this is not necessarily so. History shows that this is not so by the very nature of how Christianity⁵⁸ has treated women in relationship to men due to the split between spirit and matter which has caused female desire to be treated with suspicion and over the centuries to be excluded from the picture and where sex is placed solely at the service of procreation. As we have seen from the reports on female sexuality mentioned earlier women still operate within the idea that male pleasure and desire come first and we have no reason to believe given its history that Christianity necessarily encourages women to think otherwise.⁵⁹ Furthermore the Church and secular sex education does not teach pleasure and desire within relationships.

I was surprised and shocked to see how many young women do not even like their own vaginas as demonstrated in the programme '*The Joys of Teen Sex*' with Billie JD Porter.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Heyward, 1982, *op.cit.*, p.63.

⁵⁷ Rowan Williams '*The Body's Grace*' in Eugene F. Rogers (Editor) *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), p. 313.

⁵⁸ Lisa Isherwood, (ed.), *The Good News Of The Body: Sexual Theology and Feminism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), p.9.

⁵⁹ Isherwood, 2006, *op.cit.*, pp.5-30; also Isherwood, 2007, *op.cit.*, pp.37-64.

⁶⁰ Billie JD Porter, *The Joy of Teen Sex*, Series 2 Episode 4.

She tells us that some of these young women are determined to have corrective surgery, labiaplasty, so they can have neat vaginas that look like women porno stars just to please their boyfriends.⁶¹ The result of surgery often reduces sensitivity and any pleasurable experience these women may have because of scarring. During this episode of the documentary Porter introduced the viewers to Tara Scott and Poppy Chancellor who are half-sisters and their campaign against FGM which is backed by the 'trendiest Women's Institute (WI) in the country' the 'Shoreditch Sisters'.⁶² Porter identified this corrective surgery of young women and even girls as young as eleven who were waiting in this queue. The correlation for her was that this choice was on the spectrum of FGM even though it was voluntary, it was seated in a hatred of body parts because this particular part did not adequately fit the male gaze.⁶³ The campaign incorporated a project co-ordinated by Tara who is an artist in the creative task of stitching 8" by 8" knitted squares to make a vagina quilt. Each square incorporates a unique vagina design to celebrate the diversity of shape, form and size of women's Vulva's, to demonstrate 'the positive, beautiful and powerful traits of women's bodies'.⁶⁴ We can see in the picture below the colourful designs of some of these creations just to illustrate this dedicated task that not only brings women into the forum that encourages them to love their vagina's, but mainly to highlight and remember the millions of women in the world who are subjected to this horrendous act of FGM. This not only destroys the seat of female power of sexual desire and pleasure, 'but also subjects women to a lifetime of horrific pain due to ongoing infections and terrible complications in childbirth and can ultimately for many be life threatening'.⁶⁵ Porter reports a certain degree of self-hatred of the vagina, which is seemingly rampant in mainstream society, with young women who desperately want to get it right for their male partner.⁶⁶ Both the voluntary cut and tuck for a neat vagina which is a cosmetic choice made by many western girls and FGM, which is enforced on girls because of religious beliefs, are ultimately about male control. This begs the question, that if you don't even like your own body or you are forced into FGM, how can you have a pleasurable homecoming and nurturing of mutual relationship? This brings to mind a feminist cry of freedom, whilst our sisters suffer then we all suffer, reminding the reader of the interconnectivity between us all as bodies.

<http://www.channel4.com/programmes/the-joy-of-teen-sex> [Accessed on 15th October 2011].

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² <https://twitter.com/EmbroideriesFGM>; <http://www.embroideriescampaign.org.uk> [Accessed on March 11th 2011].

⁶³ Porter, *ibid.*

⁶⁴ The Shoreditch Sisters, 'Fight for FGM' *Newspaper Article*, 2011. The image of the Vagina Quilt is copyright to Ph: Daniel Hambury http://www.hackneygazette.co.uk/news/shoreditch_sisters_fight_female_genital_mutilation [Accessed on March 11th 2011].

⁶⁵ The Shoreditch Sisters, *ibid.*

⁶⁶ Porter, *ibid.*



Figure 16 'The Vagina Quilt'

WI The Shoreditch Sisters

This image was in my notebook linking it to the work that is being done around raising awareness for FGM with the choices young women are making around corrective surgery named as labiaplasty. Our global sisters are literally being stitched up by cultural demands to suit the male and the girls in western society are choosing to correct their vaginas to please their men. Which begs me to ask the question what is the difference? The quilt however as an art form that invites our sisters to reconsider that vaginas come in all shapes and sizes and asks women to celebrate them in the beauty and gloriousness of their difference. I am also reminded of my own vagina in this celebratory image of the vagina quilt and endeavor to begin to acknowledge its colonised experience as a child and woman in the image below in Figure 17. First comes anger, then discovery and finally acceptance which for me has been a long journey. Informing the girl child of her vaginal beauty needs to begin in girlhood, perhaps it needs to part of a healthy sex education within the national curriculum.

Many within the Church have the expectation that marriage is a safe haven for women and childrearing within Christian families, however, it is often a place of violation.

Susan Brock Thistlethwaite, reports

United Methodist Programme For Women In Crisis – 1 in 27 Christian fundamentalist wives have been raped. - 1 in 13 have been abused. - 1 in 4 have been verbally and emotionally abused This is as high if not higher than secular marriage and many of the wives accept the abuse because God gives women more pain which is an allusion to Genesis 3:16.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Susan Brock Thistlethwaite, 'Every Two Minutes', in Judith Plaskow and Carol Christ, *Weaving the Vision: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality* (New York: HarperCollins, 1989), pp.302-11.

We know from other research that Christian marriage is far from being immune to these abuses of women and figures very high on the lists of abusive behaviour to wives and daughters. While I appreciate the sentiment of coming home to yourself within a sexually and emotionally loving marriage expressed by Rowan Williams I feel he romanticises for women that which is not yet a safe and level playing field, too much is assumed without examining the consequences of the Church's prohibitions with regard to sexuality and its unconscious, and often conscious, promotion of the superior position of the male. Although he is proposing what appears to be a relational theology he does not seem aware of the deep obstacles to that becoming to oneself which is not a reality in the lives of many women, but should be.



Figure 17 'Monster of the Deep', acrylic, 2008. Megan Clay.

This is a reflection of Keller's Monster of the Deep that is waiting in Tohu Vabohu the Chaos and the void. The feminine face of the deep hides her fury in her depths." Can you hear me" she cries her voice is heard resonating through the experiential narratives that make up feminist liberation theologies, her tehomic fury disrupts and transgresses carefully laid boundaries that contain and stunt life's flow.

The image above which was painted in 2008 demonstrates the anger roaring up out of the depths of my being that had been buried for so long and had its roots in male dominance over my sexuality. This appeared to be the experience of many women and is often more real than the relationality that Williams speaks of. I realised that this 'roaring monster' was my own seat of power as it is for all women and a place that signals to us our well-being. It was a time of remembering and reflecting on my experience during my time of celibacy which I had chosen as part of the beginning of my Christian journey as an adult. I had begun to unravel my sexual experience through painting images that removed the multiple layers which had accumulated over the years.

The six images shown in the early part of the introduction that were born from counselling were part of this peeling away. I had begun to realise what I had been robbed and deprived of from my childhood, the experience of which had accumulated more within a violent marriage and other relationships since my divorce. I painted many images exploring my sexual power connecting them to this powerful spiritual journey. I was on a sabbatical, away from those relationships that had seemed to bind me and now I could fully connect with the fury in my depths.

Irigaray, from her experience, echoes my voice and that of many other women. This following piece from her book *'Elemental Passions'* illustrates and helps give expression to the many meanings that the image in Figure 17 above holds within it, as she eloquently describes

That ancient wound which bleeds from the imperceptible pain of nothing, an incrustation of your nothingness in the most innocent part of my flesh, is that not the present that again and again you leave me in place of what you take? How many times without end will you return to make use of that gift within me? Leaving ceaselessly leaving, so that you can come back and create, in the spacing of that evermore repeated to and fro, a nothingness that you seek to master by dint of repetition.⁶⁸

After much journeying within the depths of myself during that time of celibacy that lasted six years, the erotic journey of coming home to myself was beginning. It confirmed for me what had been elusive for a long time within unequal power relationships, that these two elements of sexuality and spirituality were integral to one another. This was a time of realising that my own pleasure and desires were important to me as a Christian woman. Heyward states that, 'the value of sexual pleasure testifies to the more encompassing value of erotic power as sacred'.⁶⁹ Keller's work *'Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming'* also acted as a catalyst for bringing this image to life to express this momentous experience of this part of my journey and making sense of that experience. I was reminded that violence against women on every level

⁶⁸ Irigaray, 1992, *op.cit.*, p.11.

⁶⁹ Heyward, 1989, *op.cit.*, p.95.

is held at the mouth of this chaotic void that Keller calls 'the feminine face of the deep',⁷⁰ in which the dominant order of patriarchy has halted the feminine and reigned over the bodies of women for the last two millennium of Christianity. Eve Ensler tell us of her dawning consciousness of this phenomenal reality of violence against women which hit her full force whilst travelling 'from city to city and country to country where hundreds of women queued, after watching her show the Vagina Monologues, waiting to talk to her about their experiences'.⁷¹ After of hearing those stories Ensler categorically declares that

nothing was more important than stopping violence toward women-that the desecration of women indicated the failure of human beings to honour and protect life and that this failing would, if we did not correct it, be the end of us all. I do not think I am being extreme. When you rape beat, maim, mutilate, burn, bury and terrorize women you destroy the essential life energy on the planet. You force what is meant to be open, trusting and nurturing, creative and alive to be bent, infertile and broken.⁷²

In Ensler's words I hear my own experience and that of millions of women globally whose experiences I have encountered through feminist liberation theology. The destruction brought about through these acts of violence upon the female body, a destruction that goes to the heart of the female sexual/spiritual becoming has led me to question many of the Church pronouncements about the female body.

In the report 'The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality' [Vatican City, December 8, 1995] the Catholic Church lays out its position on sexuality saying that sexual fulfilment and desire can only be sanctioned within marriage.⁷³ Chastity is required of all single people who have the maturity to be sexually active. Many commentators have discussed how this picture of perfect chastity followed by perfect sexual intercourse is both unrealistic and even potentially harmful particularly to women.⁷⁴ This is because the teaching runs counter to how humans develop in terms of moving towards sexual maturity, they do not go from holding hands to full intercourse. Further given the unequal power dynamics invested in heterosexuality, an inexperienced and eager male could traumatise rather than give pleasure to his equally inexperienced partner.

⁷⁰ Keller, 2003, *op.cit.*, p.7.

⁷¹ Ensler *op.cit.*, p.xxxi.

⁷² *op.cit.*, p.xxxii

⁷³ Compiled by S Alfonso Card. López Trujillo, President of the Pontifical Council for the Family and + Most Rev. Elio Sgreccia, Titular Bishop of Zama Minor Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Family

See Catholic Church sanction on 'Human Sexuality' - 'The Vatican: The Holy See'

www.vatican.va/.../rc_pc_family_doc_08121995_human-sexuality [Accessed on 15th July 2010].

⁷⁴ Ruether, 1998, *op.cit.*, pp.66-7.

This report like most church reports dealing with sexuality has exclusion at its heart, it does not address different expressions of sexuality⁷⁵, indeed if any reports do, they are limiting in heteronormative terms. The Catholic Church does not consider homosexuality as sinful but does prohibit the sexual act itself as violating the divine and natural law. For those churches who understand the integral relationship between sexuality and spirituality whatever sexual orientation human beings are, there must be questions to answer here for those who are not naturally called to celibacy but of whom it is required. All church reports that I have read lack a child's perspective and most of what is said is that the child is to receive the teaching of both parents within the matter of sex education. This is quite disturbing as it does not seem to acknowledge the sexual nature of the child or the possibilities of a range of gender performances available to the growing child, which has been pointed out to us for a century at least in the writings of psychology. The reports by their exclusion signal to me that they still accept the 'innocent' nature of childhood which appears to suggest a non-sexual nature and indeed this position speaks for itself.

Church reports continue to lay down patterns of exclusion of 'the other' with regard to sexuality. In October 2004, the Anglican Church produced *The Windsor Report* which brought surprise and shock to many and instigated heated debates. It highlighted the fears that the Church has in relation to bodies and sex but mainly focused its attention on who and who not it was acceptable to have sex with. The debate concluded that Christians must love the person not the act, however the way in which the report was framed could be considered homophobic. This debate by the Bishops and their written report was led, it was claimed, by scripture and the Holy Spirit. What the Bible says and how the Holy Spirit leads in such matters is often less than illuminating. Isherwood who is just one of the responders of this report says that

As a liberative theological praxis scripture is a second act. In other words, once the lived reality has been assessed and liberation needs to be found, scripture is reflected on and used as part of the liberation matrix of action and reflection and more action...the report appears to assume a uniform reading under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁶

Relying on scripture as a first act does not include the real lives of people or indeed include them in any debates about their lives. Human rights are ignored and overridden by rules of uniformity and heteronormativity, Isherwood says

What is the suggestion here, that we do away with contextual reading, both contemporary and historical, and simply rely on the Spirit, who one suspects will speak through the hierarchy? There is also a worrying implicit

⁷⁵ Isherwood, 2006, *op.cit.*, pp.62-66.

⁷⁶ Lisa Isherwood, 'Scripture for Liberation' in Andrew Linzey and Richard Kirker, (eds.), *Gays and the Future of Anglicanism: Responses to the Windsor Report* (Winchester: O Books, 2005), Ch.4, pp.49-59.

message, which is, that unity implies uniformity. Despite talk of diverse cultures and regions there is a strong element of the 'fresh appreciation of the riches of the gospel' having already been decided by the central body of the church. This is colonialism rearing its ugly head and the tone is one of impatient paternalism.⁷⁷

Sexual lives have been tossed around on a mighty sea of distrust for the sake of a disembodied spirituality that drives a mechanistic wheel of rigid restrained religiosity stretching back to the Church Fathers. This report resounded loudly with an echo of the past filled with traumatic events, silenced voices and denial of embodied lives in an effort to normalise gender. Feminist scholars of hermeneutics Isherwood reminds us have shown that

there is power behind so many seemingly 'natural' aspects of gender and sexuality. With this power comes hierarchy and with hierarchy, exclusion and eventually persecution. Of course persecution in this day and age may not be public executions but rather a life time of having to hide and even deny who one is for fear of social consequences.⁷⁸

The Anglican Church has a blind spot in this area and cannot see their own part in re-enforcing harsh divisions. In the foreword of the report the Most Reverend Dr Robin Eames Archbishop of Armagh suggested that human sexuality had been at the heart of the divisions within successive Lambeth Conferences, he says,

Since the 1970s controversies over issues of human sexuality have become increasingly divisive and destructive throughout Christendom. Within the Anglican Communion the intensity of debate on these issues at successive Lambeth Conferences has demonstrated the reality of these divisions⁷⁹.

This report clearly shows its difficulty in acceptance of difference within sexual relationships and much misunderstanding. The Report talks of the practice of violence within marriage, trivialisation and commercialisation of sex all in the same breath as homosexuality demonstrating a total lack of understanding of homosexual lives. This seems a little at odds with the following extract from the report,

...while rejecting homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture, calls on all our people to minister pastorally and sensitively to all irrespective of sexual orientation and to condemn irrational fear of homosexuals, violence within marriage and any trivialisation and commercialisation of sex;⁸⁰

While condemning irrational fear the report itself appears to have much that is irrational embedded in it. It does not seem true to its own desire and I agree with Isherwood when she says

⁷⁷ *op.cit.*, p.51.

⁷⁸ *op.cit.*, p.55.

⁷⁹ The Windsor Report Published by The Anglican Communion Office, London, UK October 2004. p.4. www.anglicancommunion.org/windsor2004/downloads/index.cfm [Accessed on the 15th January 2005].

⁸⁰ *op.cit.*, p.77.

I am suggesting that homophobia that stems from culture and ecclesiastical habit be challenged by bolder readings of both scripture and tradition. That the Spirit so freely and often spoken about in this Report actually be placed beyond ecclesiastical censure and allowed to blow away the veils of gender, sex and orientation prejudice, that have no gospel basis, yet hang so accusingly over the Anglican Communion.⁸¹

Unless these ecclesiastical habits change how can we teach our children differently and change the ideas and thoughts of future generations. What and how we educate our children is important, but considering that the Christian Church still teaches from the hierarchical and heterosexual order of the male first, the girl child needs to be educated otherwise to save herself from the ongoing battle of sexism and gender difference which leads to her continual denigration. The boy child also needs educating in this knowledge to reach a deeper understanding much earlier in his development of acceptance of difference and equality of girls. Children's sexuality is not of course mentioned within this report it seems that adult human sexuality is the umbrella that includes children making it the prime responsibility of parents to educate children in the value of sexual relationships within marriage. This again reinstates heteronormative patterns for sexuality within marital relationships. The maintenance of the historical narrative within traditional theology continues. This limited view does not allow a critical analysis of heteronormativity and gender relations which is important for children and the female child because of the gender blindness of the Church in general. The disruption of heteronormative patterns of behaviour is crucial with regard to the female child's sexually developing life be she heterosexual, lesbian, bi, trans or queer. Furthermore I would argue that the Christian Churches naïve attitudes towards sexuality and the limitations that it puts upon difference sets humanity against its own nature, thus alienating itself from what is cosmically natural and divine.

The 1998 Lambeth Conference promised to discuss human sexuality and the complex issues surrounding this subject. The debate continued about homosexual relationships as if this was the only part of human sexuality worth discussing because heterosexual relationships remained behind the 'normative' locked doors of marriage. This in my view and I know in the view of many feminist theologians like Marcella Althaus Reid, Lisa Isherwood, Carter Heyward, Mary Hunt and Mary Daly, is a poor attempt to scapegoat a marginalised group of people for the sake of the heterosexual majority whose orientation does not even come into the question. I agree with Althaus-Reid's suggestion that 'heterosexuality needs to come out of the closet'⁸² because its tightly closeted life holds closely guarded secrets of sexualities that cover a broad spectrum of pleasures through diverse expressions. These expressions emerge

⁸¹ Isherwood, in Linzey and Kirker, *op.cit.*, p.59.

⁸² Althaus-Reid, 2000, *op.cit.*, p.88.

from both the conscious and unconscious which she calls 'indecent'. Indecent theology brings to the fore an economic and political analysis of sexuality while also revealing the sexual ideology underpinning systematic theology. Althaus-Reid says that 'sexual ideologies are foundational in economic and political structures of oppression, just as they remain foundational in the understanding of ourselves in relation to God'.⁸³ An illustration of this is drawn where Althaus-Reid shows us that we can find God in the sexual and economic daily lives of the lemon vendors of Buenos Aires who do not wear underwear. If they cannot sell enough lemons, they then sell themselves to feed their children, some of these poor women are 'unusual Christian believers'⁸⁴ who mix their economic and sexual lives with their worshipping communities, taking with them to communion with God the smell of lemons and sex. Althaus-Reid says that 'poverty and sensuality as a whole has been marginalised in theology... She says that a theology of the poor needs also to be a sexual theology... a theology of economics and desires that have been excluded from our way of doing theology as a second act'.⁸⁵ Althaus-Reid tells us that 'it is not stability but discontinuity'⁸⁶ that is needed to disrupt the normative structures of systematic theology that ignores sexual lives and voices of the marginalised. This is not only for the lemon vendors of Buenos Aires, but for all who hold this position of poverty and marginalisation. She refers to the 'exclusionary process of the theology which used to be called *la caminata* or 'the walking' process of reflecting and acting-reflecting-acting on historical experiences from the marginalised people of God'.⁸⁷ Indecent theology then is born out of the 'sexual experiences of the poor using economic and political analysis while unveiling the sexual ideology of systematic theology'.⁸⁸ Thus taking us into a realm that the church reports cannot even imagine and would not even consider connecting sexuality directly to the economic or political because it is blinded by its own tightly bounded morality. They could not begin to imagine what Althaus-Reid means by theology being a sex act. Her assertion is that all theology is sexual and incorporates the whole person politically and personally inside or outside of the closet. She says,

Out-of-the closet theologians do not leave the personal aside and that always implies a risk, but neither do the closeted side. It would be delusory to believe that the closeted theologians can compartmentalise their lives so easily. The difference is that closeted theologians indulge permanently in duplicity between the realms of a public and private theology.⁸⁹

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ *op.cit.*, p.5.

⁸⁵ *op.cit.*, p.4.

⁸⁶ *op.cit.*, p.6.

⁸⁷ *op.cit.*, p.14.

⁸⁸ *op.cit.*, p.9.

⁸⁹ *op.cit.*, p.88.

Althaus-Reid shakes the theological ground of theologians' sexual assumptions about others whilst the same closeted theologians continue to deny their own eros and desire.

In the final report of the International Synod of Anglican Bishops in 1999 that was presented in 2005 indicates that it had not moved on from its sexuality debate in a specific area. Human sexuality in the Anglican communions' eyes still focuses on fear of the other in a sexual orientated way. The agreements they reached were first that scripture was foundational for all aspects of their work.⁹⁰ Second, this sexual issue was about 'homosexual behaviour not the homosexual person that they were called as a community in Christ to love as they were called to love any other people'.⁹¹ They reaffirmed section five of the Lambeth report 1998 which noted 'some of the other expressions of sexuality – beginning with promiscuity and every kind of sexually abusive behaviour – that are plainly contrary to the Christian way'.⁹² The last point was the fear of fragmentation of the Anglican Communion which is a gift, through these issues regarding human sexuality. 'Fear of further division through homosexuality taking on the ultimate sexualisation of the Church, making sexuality more powerful, or claiming more of our attention than God'.⁹³ Sexuality then is only addressed in these terms and does not address the child or gender anywhere else in the report.

There does not seem to be any movement from throughout these reports they just seem to regurgitate the same stuff about scripture, listening, looking at difference and trying to find ways of embracing diversity but despite these efforts they do not seem to move on. Child abuse is mentioned as an aside to illustrate a rule that distinguishes difference and is not prioritised. Child abuse in its many forms is abhorrent and I would argue is an assault on the sexual/sensual and spiritual life of the child. This is because of the interdependency and integral relationship of these two elements so is in itself an assault on the whole child. The manifestation of which can be noted through various stages of growth and can be carried right through life and it is far too an important issue to sidelined. My art work illustrates the physical impact on the body of the child and how the experience is stored and later manifests in a sensual, physical way throughout the developing body. Many adults are still suffering from the results of such childhood experiences of which their stories help to create the reflective praxis of feminist liberation theologies. Art within its many creative channels also brings that praxis to life.

⁹⁰ 'A final report from the International Anglican Conversations on Human Sexuality', point 1. p.4. <http://www.anglicancommunion.org> [Accessed on 15th March 2011].

⁹¹ Point 2., *ibid.*

⁹² Point 6., *ibid.*

⁹³ Point 8., *op.cit.*, p.5.

The correlation of the ordination of women priests and the sexual abuse of children were made clear recently within a Vatican statement saying that 'The attempted ordination' of women was one of the gravest crimes under church law, putting it in the same category as clerical sexual abuse of minors, heresy and schism'.⁹⁴ As we know, the inequality of women within the Church stems from such a misogynistic root. This has had a profound effect on women and still does, because of their sex, preventing them from living fully embodied spiritual lives within the public arena of Christian life. This by example could have a negative effect on the self esteem of the female child.

The Anglican Diocese of Edmonton in Canada in response to the Human Sexuality Lambeth report considered that it held promise and hope of embracing the bigger picture of human sexuality. The Diocese itself then went on to try and illustrate that bigger picture

Our discussions in the diocese on the topic of human sexuality have been about far more than just what is done with our genitalia. Human sexuality is about who we are as human beings and how we live in this world as men and women. It is addressed in scripture; it is present in every human relationship. When we shrink the conversation and make our sexuality discussions about only one aspect of sexual life, or one set of behaviours we do not give enough care and respect to this topic. Therefore, this report for synod is not only about the recent conversations in the church about same-gender relationships, but concerns the fullness of our lives as sexual beings created in the image of God.⁹⁵

This could include children and opens the door for that possibility if it accepts human diversity across the whole spectrum of humanity. Further along in this document it addresses sexuality, youth and children and declares that

There was a general feeling in our discussions that the church through her teaching, preaching, and life in community could be giving more guidance in the area of sexuality to our young people. People talked of a need to emphasize the need to respect self, one another, and other views, to relate it to the greater reality of Christian love.⁹⁶

The Anglican Community in Edmonton seem to be way ahead of other Anglican communities globally. Loving relationships go a large way to securing and nurturing a healthy sexual embodiment. After studying the Anglican report on 'Conversations on Human Sexuality' and the Windsor Report, I wondered just how far we have moved on from the Church Fathers fear of the sexual/sensual body. The inequality of gender and sexuality is still there, men still are in the main privy to conducting meetings that decide the spiritual/sexual fate and matters of salvation within tight scriptural frameworks, regarding so many human beings, in such an

⁹⁴ www.Guardian.co.uk [Accessed on July 15th 2010].

⁹⁵ <http://edmonton.anglican.org/63rd-synod-2012/human-sexuality-report/> p.1. [Accessed on 22nd September 2012].

⁹⁶ *op.cit.*, p.9.

exclusive way and within a certain masculine model. This cannot work, no matter what nice words and language they may frame statements of; 'we (male Bishops) created a sacred space in which our differences became sources of mutual enlightenment and new insights'.⁹⁷ This clearly shows that these assumptions informed by scripture are exclusively made out of 'our' own experience and moral judgement as heterosexual males. I question this because if we are going to take seriously what Althaus-Reid says about heterosexuality needing to come out of the closet and show its indecency we need to challenge the male bishops about the heteronormative composition of their synods. While they do not question their group and seem to take pride in their heterosexual assumptions what we actually see is the same homoerotic behaviour of the early Church Fathers and their boy gangs which seems to me causes all sorts of confusion about heteronormative behaviours. It could be argued that in closely defining their group they create a form of heterosexuality that does not even fit heterosexuals, this is what Althaus-Reid meant by asking heterosexuals to come out to a more honest description of what heterosexuality may be for a wider range of people. So where have we moved to in the acceptance of one another in all our diversity within creation before we go deeper and deeper into the void of misunderstanding. References to children are only considered mostly within an abusive framework. Although on a recent visit a seemingly positive note was struck by Pope Benedict XIV regarding the spiritual encouragement of young people in his benevolent Glasgow homily

My dear young Catholics of Scotland. I urge you to lead lives worthy of our Lord and yourselves. There are many temptations placed before you today - drugs, sex, money, pornography, alcohol – which the world tells you will bring you happiness, yet these things are destructive and divisive. There is only one thing that lasts: the love of Jesus Christ personally for each one of you. Search for him, know him and love him and he will set you free from the slavery of the glittering but superficial frequently proposed by today's society. Put aside what is worthless to your own dignity as children of God. In today's gospel, Jesus asks us to pray for vocations. I pray that many of you will know and love Jesus Christ and through that encounter will dedicate yourself completely to God, especially those who are called to the priesthood and religious life. This is the challenge the Lord gives you today: the Church belongs to you!⁹⁸

Sexuality and embodiment are not mentioned here and neither is gender difference, I suppose in the light of recent events within the Catholic Church they would be hard pressed to mention sexuality as a direct valued embodied process. I see here a disembodied spiritual directive with no consideration of the youth's bodies he is speaking to. Whilst I understand the dangers of superficial living, it is a depressing thought that healthy sexual relationships are not

⁹⁷ Conversations on Human Sexuality, *op.cit.*, p.1.

⁹⁸ <http://www.Guardian.co.uk> [Accessed on 15th September 2010].

encouraged and absent within the Catholic churches spiritual idealism that makes certain bodies absent. The Pope's words of love seem deep, meaningful and kind but there is sense of containment in them. The Jesus that meets people where they are is not in this frame of reference which to me is full of conditional innuendos and instruction that takes for granted tamed young spiritual lives that echo the Church Fathers as passive receptors. There is no indication here in how to search and find the Christ of experience except through the words said by the Pope with reference to the scripture of 'today's gospel' the modern day translated Word of old. The inherent white western male metaphysical Christ who is romantically presented as a sanitised, asexual being is here focusing on male priests first and religious orders who are cloistered women and men second. This is with a reference to say where young people ought to be heading with spirituality through a dictatorial cloistered Christian faith.

Through this examination of recent church documents about sexuality and I accept I have been selective, I am left acknowledging that Christ has been taken out of the confines of the Church building but questioning which Christ and is this the Christ of liberative praxis or the same narrowly defined Christ who controls and reduces life? There still appears to be very little if any reflection on the lived experience of real people as the basis for these documents. While not wishing to diminish the role of scripture and tradition in the reflections of the church it does seem to me that flesh and blood lives and reflection on these lives needs to be central to any church pronouncements. But can Christianity do this, does it have within it the flexibility of central precepts such as Christology to make the move to lived experience counting – it would seem that discussions on human sexuality cannot go much further without it.

Catholic feminist liberation theologian Isherwood presents us with a multifaceted, multi-embodied Christology that can meet the diversity of all human beings by opening the theological door and liberating Christ.⁹⁹ She tells us that the Christ of the gospels clearly meets people where they are, he wanders freely amongst the people eating, talking, shouting, laughing, weeping, sleeping, touching and healing with a passion. The Christ that she encourages us to embrace is this and more 'This is the risky Christ, the free flowing Christ instead of the once-and-for-all child of God that she says...she is willing to sacrifice for liberation and the kingdom...becoming flesh is risky because it leaves behind all the certainty of metaphysical absolutes'.¹⁰⁰ Isherwood's Christology of liberation opens an empowering space for women enabling them to celebrate and embrace a Christ that meets them within

⁹⁹ Isherwood, 1999, *op.cit.*, p.147.

¹⁰⁰ *op.cit.*, pp.147-148.

their own cultural context.¹⁰¹ She suggests that we 'look into history for the enfleshed transgressive Christ'¹⁰² who will draw us closer to the kingdom than we are now. She demonstrates the Christ of diversity who is with us and in us, 'Emmanuel, God with us'.¹⁰³ 'The Christ' Isherwood says who '...is beneath our feet, before our eyes, in our hearts and throbbing between us is able, and willing, to burst out. Seize your moment-enflesh the Christ you profess to believe in'.¹⁰⁴ This is a big and intimate Christ, not beyond relating to our experience, our woundedness, our joy, our pleasure and desire, a relational Christ. In this work we begin to see the possibility for a Christ in flesh, all flesh which opens the way to consider the female child's sexuality which can now be seen as her Christic nature, as part of what Isherwood says makes us human/divine people. Isherwood does not address the child directly in her work but she certainly creates that flexible Christ that is a step for us to move ahead in matters of human sexuality including that of the child. For her as for Heyward, the dynamis of which Jesus speaks in the gospel of Mark is the foundation of all life and is there from the beginning. This power that draws us out into relation and thereby into our own divine natures is there for the child as for the adult and is based in sexuality as much as in any other part of what it is to be human.

The relational Christ that feminist theologian Heyward presents begins with an embodiment of all that we are deep within ourselves. Being in touch with who we are in our sexuality, in our senses and emotionally, this enables us to relate to ourselves, to others and the rest of creation.

Our sexuality is our desire to participate in making love, making justice, in the world: our drive toward one another: our movement in love: our expression of being bonded together in life and death. Sexuality is expressed not only between lovers in personal relationship, but also in the work of an artist who loves her painting or her poetry, a father who loves his children, a revolutionary who loves her people.¹⁰⁵

She says that we need to start from our own personal experience and value our own humanity in the body. Most of us who are women do not even know what that means within a Christian context because of the way doctrine ushers us in and out of tight contained boundaries that do not even allow us to think and feel. As women we do not always know how to value our humanity because of the narrow definition of what it is to be woman and the lack of space to unfold and become. It can take some of us several lifetimes to know who we are in our bodies.

¹⁰¹ Embodied Christologies include - Black African and womanists, Latin American, a variety of Asian interpretations including Christ among the Shamans and even the queer Christ, See - Isherwood, 1999, *op.cit.*, pp.22-47, 46-47, 110-127, 89-109.

¹⁰² *op.cit.*, p.148.

¹⁰³ Matthew, 1:23.

¹⁰⁴ Isherwood, 1999, *op.cit.*, p.150.

¹⁰⁵ Heyward, 1989, *op.cit.*, p.92.

However, Heyward speaks of a relational Christ and that relation begins in our own bodies and opens up new avenues of hope and potential even co-redemptive potential she says is, 'The operative theo-logical assumption throughout is that God and humanity need to be understood as relational and co-operative'.¹⁰⁶ This bypasses dualistic and monistic assumptions of tradition and for her, opens the question of Gods own redemption.

Traditional Christianity that maintains 'the sacrificial saviour Christ' limits an engagement in relationship with the divine and needs to be re-imaged. Heyward says that 'Jesus did not do it for us; Jesus' life does not spare us the need to live our own or to discover ourselves in relationship to God, Jesus has shown us the way'¹⁰⁷ through an example of his own life. Heyward suggests that 'the re-imaging of Jesus opens up the possibility of relationship...It is a process of expressing something about a reality, of expressing a relation that we know already between ourselves and in what we image...Jesus' incarnation is a relational experience'.¹⁰⁸ Heyward tells us that relationship is fundamental to our lives, our quality of living and she finds the basis for this praxis of relationality in Martin Buber work where he says 'Relation is reciprocity...we live in the currents of reciprocity...he who hates directly is closer to relation than those who are without love and hate...in the beginning is the relation'.¹⁰⁹ So unless we feel or are moved with passion for something or someone or a situation that is unjust, then we distance ourselves and deny the very thing that can nurture us and give us life and meaning. When we begin to think in this way it is hard to think outside of relatedness because of our interdependency on one another and the cosmos itself. Heyward's reference to *dunamis* as the erotic when used in mutual relationship is very powerful and we all have access to it. Heyward refers to the haemorrhaging woman to illustrate the relational erotic in action within the gospel of Mark.¹¹⁰ In this moment Jesus felt his power, his *dunamis* going out from him. It was the woman touching his garment in faith that drew on that power, the woman's need and desire for healing and Jesus' openness to that action that Heyward says is a 'ministry of intimacy'.¹¹¹ This is mutuality in relationship is a two way process making the power of connection possible. The woman was empowered, healed by the touch and intimacy of that relationship. Heyward says 'that this intense vulnerable commitment enabled the flow of healing between them'. She argues 'that *dunamis* in relation is divine power and affects the healer and the healed'.¹¹² So here we see Jesus' embodied action in relationship.

¹⁰⁶ Heyward, 1982, *op.cit.*, p.1.

¹⁰⁷ *op.cit.*, p.18.

¹⁰⁸ *op.cit.*, p.31.

¹⁰⁹ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, Walter Kaufman (trans.) (New York: Charles Scribner Son's, 1970). p.69.

¹¹⁰ Mark, 5:25-34.

¹¹¹ Heyward, *op.cit.*, p.45.

¹¹² *ibid.*

Brock talks about Christ's healing power becoming operational through his own woundedness. So in our acceptance of our own woundedness we too can be part of that process as 'wounded healers'¹¹³ and so becoming part of an interrelated healing of ourselves with the other person. Traditional theology does not teach or encourage this way of communicating through touch, the sensuousness of engaging with other bodies through the erotic power of love. Touch is fundamental to our well being, but it has become a fear based taboo in our dealings with each other, with children in schools, in care homes and it is sanitised out of our lives not only through how we think but also with cleansing chemicals and now we don't even have to touch the containers themselves because of the automated release or sensor and we are invited to wear protective gloves so as not to be contaminated or to contaminate; never mind the contamination of the environment. This reminds me of the Christian church at some level of its resistance to contamination by difference on any level but in particular issues of human sexuality/spirituality which is based in the fear of diversity. It seems that the relational thread is full of tension. However intimacy's revolutionary door is held wide open by Heyward who calls us to 'revolutionary relationships that require us to be real with one another, really present with one another and honest'.¹¹⁴ She tells us that the erotic power of God is love and our creative source and that we need to embrace it and live by it. Dunamis gives us divine authority and it is with this divine authority of sacred power that enables us to nurture relationship as resources of growth as co-creative women and men, so that we may act morally/ethically and joyfully¹¹⁵ this is part of how we take responsibility for godding ourselves and the earth.¹¹⁶ An embodied spirituality such as this shows the integrated relationship between sexuality and spirituality and its divine nature. As we can see the process of reclaiming a positive embodied sexuality has begun within a feminist theological discourse it is up to us as women to claim the space and live in it. Where do we begin in relationship to children? I have tried to show resources that show divine/human connections within the erotic creativity of God where and how does this fit with the female child? Children are very much part of this being-ness, the gift of their inspired sensual experienced lives should bring joy into the world. This in my view seems a good educational starting point, within the institution of family life, school communities and church where human beings are found wanting on a deep relational level due to the dualistic thinking of patriarchy, because these are the very foundations on which these institutions build their disembodied values.

¹¹³ Brock, *op.cit.*, p.42.

¹¹⁴ Heyward, 1989, *op.cit.*, p.107.

¹¹⁵ *op.cit.*, p.6.

¹¹⁶ Heyward, 1982, *op.cit.*, p.7.

The Outsider Project¹¹⁷ looks at embracing sexuality and gender diversity in schools and seems hopeful but the most radical gesture it could make would be to invite the straight children to come out to play and speak about their own diversity. I hope that simply by speaking their experience as free as they can be from the confines of institutional dogma which is enshrined in schools and hospitals where gender is declared at the moment of birth, and within the family. This should make us think again about the assumptions we imprint onto our children's bodies. The acknowledgement of difference can be seen with children who are born as hermaphrodites and intersex, rather than attempting as young as possible to fix this 'problem' maybe the way ahead is to allow them to grow as safely as possible in an embodied way. These are just some of the bodies that challenge society and Churches on the normalisation of human/divine bodies. Some work has been done in this area by Susannah Cornwall and she is able to demonstrate how within a theological framework the intersexed body offers possibilities for expanding the Churches understanding of the divine. Cornwall highlights the social norms of sexed bodies against bodies that are not socially accepted that have preconceived ideas that are ill informed i.e. Intersex/DSD (Disordered Sex Development) which she describes as

a kaleidoscope, a tube of mirrors reflecting society's assumptions about the nature of sex and gender back at itself and showing them up for the artifices that they are. Consideration of intersex/DSD must always turn the viewer back to considering the norms which appear evident but are actually shifting and impermanent like the kaleidoscopes coloured shapes,¹¹⁸

These multiple complex bodies of difference that fit under the umbrella name of Intersex DSD seek to be accepted and not stigmatised. Because socially the body is continually being redefined and constructed it is possible to create a liberative theological model Cornwall suggests, for

Intersex bodies incarnational theologies that quash the obstinate and intractable bodiliness bodies...These theologies like queer theologies will inform mainstream theological tradition and critique it from a liminal perspective...if we do not talk about bodies as they really are, including bodies in their variation and transgression from demarcation as male and female then we are not talking about bodies at all.¹¹⁹

Bodies are continually revealing their glorious array of difference and the sooner we accept that diversity within the theological field of Christianity is evolving the better.

¹¹⁷ This is a project set up for addressing diversity within gender and sexual orientation in children, see – Renée De Palma and Elizabeth Atkinson, (eds.), *Interrogating Heteronormativity In Primary Schools: The No Outsiders Project* (Staffordshire: Trentham Books Ltd., 2009), see also *Invisible Boundaries: Addressing Sexualities, Equality In Children's Worlds* (Staffordshire: Trentham Books Ltd., 2008).

¹¹⁸ Susannah Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ: Intersex Conditions and Christian Theology* (London: Equinox, 2010), p.236.

¹¹⁹ *op.cit.*, p.234.

Another underdeveloped way of thinking is the sexual/spiritual relational values of being conceived and our development in the womb and the process of being born. These are not explored at any depths¹²⁰ within the Church but are reduced to a set package of normative values. The work of Ettinger and others attempts to reframe the very beginnings of life in a way that could profoundly affect the development of the girl child. For Ettinger the time in the womb is one of profound relationality, far removed from the Church Fathers notion that women was no more than an incubator for the already formed person, formed in the semen of its father and implanted. This is subjective relationality in which both mother and child grow together, the matrixial border space which is how she understands it, is the foundation of what it is to be human and in stating this she challenges the Freudian notion that it is the separation from mother that defines our humanity particularly that of the male. Ettinger from a psychoanalytic perspective adds credence to feminist theologies that state that relationality is the very crux of our divine lives. Ettinger regards this space of mother and child as a sacred space, one in which our mutual humanity grows, she is clear that that is not a form of object relations simply taken back a step into the womb but rather a fully embodied mutual becoming. The implications for the agency of the child here are obvious, the child is as much the actor as the acted upon, it is no longer seen simply as a seed that grows and then delivered into the world, but rather an agent of its own becoming and that of the mother. If we accept this research then the naming and separating of genders and the projecting of the almighty God who seems to declare the necessity of such divisions is fundamentally opposed to who we are as human persons. Ettinger's work gives theology a platform as well as a great deal to think about.

While my work is about the female child I feel I need to briefly note the effect patriarchal dualism has had on men since much of what I am claiming is, that these men perpetuate the unequal declarations and actions on women and girls. The effects of living in a sexual, spiritual and relational void for men has been devastating, Nelson claims that the projection of masculinity onto God has caused much distorted thinking about this particular form of masculinity. He says, 'God has become the no need, hard, and up phallogocentric deity which as a symbol has become a weapon against women sexually,¹²¹ and has created disconnectedness from the body for men, who end up worshipping a disembodied God which in turn disembodies them. As children, many men have experienced being told by their parents

¹²⁰ However there are doorways being opened up with feminist artists and psychoanalysts see Griselda Pollock (ed), Bracha L. Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

¹²¹ James B. Nelson, 'Embracing Masculinity' in, James B. Nelson and Sandra P. Longfellow, *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological reflection* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), Ch.15, p.196.

'Big boys don't cry and be a brave soldier.' They have been taught not to show their feelings, to show a stiff upper lip and their vulnerability as humans is masked, hidden under layers of deadened emotion

No wonder we who are men having modelled deity after masculinity and then masculine after deity, find it difficult to say, "I need ...I am vulnerable," yet as body-selves we are constantly needy and vulnerable. We hunger. We hunger for breath, we hunger for food and thirst for water. We hunger for touch and closeness and we yearn with desires of love. We become ill. We become disabled. We age. We are needy vulnerable beings. That awareness is God's revelation to us.¹²²

If only men could hold onto that awareness and nurture it and allow it to grow, realising that vulnerability is a strength not a weakness and a place where seeds of transformation and consciousness can grow. The opportunity for men is there if they can recognise that having to live up to the phallic height of an unreachable external sanitised, asexual God is indeed difficult, thus showing the reason why men, in part have such deep problems in connecting to the sexual/sensual/spiritual areas of their lives. As we can see by Nelson's reality check, we can only take Jesus seriously, once we accept his divine incarnation fully into the flesh of humankind as '...the fully physical, sweating, lubricating, menstruating, ejaculating, urinating, defecating bodies that we are – in sickness and in health – are the central vehicles of God's embodiment in our experience.'¹²³ The God that Nelson speaks of is certainly one who fully incarnates sexuality and gender in all its diversity as this is fundamental to who we are in our humanity.

LGBTIQ play a large part in the shift that is taking place in the theological debate around sexuality largely due to their own reflections on the disenfranchisement of their humanity by the Christian Church and society. While Nelson agrees with this he also suggests that other groups are similarly disenfranchised by the way the church configures sexuality. These are the mentally disabled, the physically disabled, the terminally ill, and the aged, he does not mention children specifically but of course they too fit within some of these categories.

The debates around gay and lesbian people within the Church have recently turned to whether they can be married or be seen as family units with children. An article written by a female priest Judith Maltby in the Guardian highlighted that, 'Marriage is under threat we hear from some Church leaders. This is not by heterosexuals with an ever-increasing divorce rate, but by gay and lesbian people who want to express their religious faith through civil

¹²² Nelson, 1992, *op.cit.*, pp.94-95.

¹²³ *op.cit.*, p.31.

partnership'.¹²⁴ Heteronormativity is here again alive and kicking within this statement showing a 'preciousness' around what some Christians think of as Christian marriage overlooking the instability that union can often bring. Honest relationships of mutuality that offer, 'Stability, love, faithfulness, commitment, these are the things in human relating that matter'¹²⁵ rather than broad resounding prejudicial remarks that in themselves divide and damage human relations. Maltby concludes that the Church should 'foster and celebrate – in short, bless. There really is enough God to go round'.¹²⁶ I believe that once again the Church has missed an opportunity focusing on one area rather than embracing the creative and liberating work that gay and lesbian theologians are doing in the area of sexuality which goes right to the heart of what it is to be human rather than the legality of what it is to be married.

For example, Marvin M. Ellison is convinced 'that spirituality without erotic passion becomes lifeless and cold. God becomes an abstraction, an idea rather than a living presence in our lives'.¹²⁷ There does not seem to be any intimacy in our engagement with God, he goes on to say that 'the pervasive fear of sex and of strong passion, which the Church has encouraged, is coming close to killing our love life in the flesh and our passion for justice in the world'.¹²⁸ He goes on further to say, 'The church must also overcome its preoccupation with questions of sexual orientation and cease its endless harangues about the dangers and illegitimacy of sexual diversity. It is high time for the church 'to come of age' about sex and sexual pluralism in the church and in society'.¹²⁹ Ellison is also concerned that in its obsession with what he calls 'pelvic orthodoxy' the Churches focus simply on marriage ethics and in so doing overlook a wide and significant range of human sexual life leaving people without any guidance and simply prohibition. I agree wholeheartedly with Ellison, however we cannot make the church come of age. Instead we need to investigate other ways of thinking, doing and living that will have a radical impact and this may mean troubling the waters and disrupting heteronormative spaces, living queerly as heterosexual as well as homosexual persons. Being conscious of our sexuality and being aware that all are included, even children whatever their gender is crucial in making this move forward.

The idea of sexual innocence is so pervasive in Christian thought around the child's sexuality. In fact it is both a dangerous and yet an alluring concept that can open the door to abuse through unequal power relations between the adult and child. The girl child needs to know her sexual value and power in order to build self-esteem which, within a Christian

¹²⁴ www.Guardian.co.uk [Accessed 26th Feb 2011].

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²⁶ *ibid.*

¹²⁷ Ellison in Thatcher and Stuart, *op.cit.*, Ch.5.2, p.222.

¹²⁸ *op.cit.*, 223.

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

context is equally important however fluid that sexual expression may become as she evolves into adulthood. Acknowledgement of sexual bodies and engaging with our natural selves takes a conscious effort both with ourselves and others within the 'Earth Community'.¹³⁰ To be present in this way is important and will hopefully challenge the fear that has been contrived by socially constructed sexual bodies.

Our creativity is a crucial part of how we view our sexual bodies. We need to own who we are as best we can, how we feel, our passion, our anger, our pleasure, our outrage, our laughter, our sadness and grief. Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel looks at the ways of a changing a society that is still stamped with the values of western Christianity made visible through the values that are placed on 'childhood, youth, sickness, and old age, all of which are part of our human embodied being in process'.¹³¹ She says there are in fact other ways of looking at our bodies to celebrate this human embodied process, besides the dread that church and society has historically placed within us in relation to our bodies. Moltmann-Wendel tells us that 'Being a body can also be the experience of well-being, of being alive, a conscious experience of the rhythms of the body'.¹³² Connecting to nature through our senses can bring us alive to ourselves, as can engagement with the music, art, poetry and books, pleasure that we get from this interaction are important to spiritual embodied experience. Moltmann-Wendell reminds us that 'Church and culture have made pleasure suspect to us. A child has this sense of the body and it is the upbringing and culture of our society which distances us from our bodies and teaches us to control our bodies'.¹³³

Pseudo remedies of New Age therapeutic practices and gymnasium subscribing are limiting and unhelpful in the long term health they are quick fixes presenting us with a veneer of healthiness because they are part of the control factor. The underlying problems remain encased in the mechanistic framework of inherited values leaving us at risk within our embodied spiritual health. Societal norms that are so tightly constructed then it seems can kill, maim or bury the spiritual element of our embodied living, thus preventing a healthy creative sexual development that can lead to abundant living, the Christian promise that Christ came to tell us was God's desire for our humanity.

The denial of our embodied spiritual selves as women and the consequences of that denial limit us to survival and a superficial existence. Tess Tessier has a more subjective approach toward women's liberation. She investigates the effects denial has had on three

¹³⁰ Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grimm (eds.), *Thomas Berry: The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2009), pp.111-18.

¹³¹ Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendell, *I Am My Body: New Ways of Embodiment* (London: SCM Press. 1994), p.84.

¹³² *op.cit.*, p.2.

¹³³ *op.cit.*, p.3.

groups of sexually/spiritually disenfranchised women the categories of which are HIV, lesbian, and childhood sexual abuse. Tessier suggests that although she has chosen these three groups to write about this could be applied to women in general, who live within the territory of denial daily because of the very nature of who they are in their bodies. She like Moltmann-Wendell encourages us to listen for our own internal rhythm, a rhythm that can be disrupted and buried deep inside us as women through abuse on many levels. Having the opportunity to dive deep into that depth are sometimes hindered or even prevented completely, by the oppressive forces of heteronormativity and entrapped busy lives that are bestowed upon us by the very systems that offer us freedom and liberation. Once we are aware of this and there are many ways in which we can become aware, one of which is usually through our entrapped and disenfranchised lives, where we are consistently kept out of the arena of equal opportunity and the pressure becomes too much. The possibility of recovery is here in the listening and diving through our layers of internal depth. This is the process that my art in the introduction demonstrates as seen in Figures 1-7, I was diving deep down into my unconscious world, of the constructed layers of my experience, thus undoing these experiences from childhood through to womanhood in order to make a fresh claim of power/dunamis in my life. Tessier tells us that 'From beyond the darkness there is a sound of drumming. Not a solid or settled rhythm, but a wild and chaotic pounding like the clatter of a heart in terror or orgasm...' ¹³⁴ I was aware of this drumming and the energy that encompassed me as I painted, which was fired from within.

This is a calling on my/our erotic power that has been banished not only to the depth of my/our being and the outer margins of patriarchal societal values, but also to the void at the beginning of the creation stories of Genesis ¹³⁵ and what Catherine Keller names as 'Tohu Vabohu', ¹³⁶ the lost face of the feminine within the chaos and the void. Here we see the internal sexual/spiritual connection of the feminine, the energy that has been denied, and instead treated as hysteria, madness, worthless, and beneath patriarchal reasoning and metaphysical love. Tessier says it is

the dance of wild things. This drumming lives in us. The erotic within is connected to all living things, the earth and the cosmos and will not be denied.

We know this music, we human creatures... Still, most of us living in the world of industry and the individual have learned to fear this music, to dread the way it undoes our carefully packaged personalities. And we study to unlearn it, to un-feel it, to tone it down. We mute the mysterious and control the chaotic, all to deny the wild within...We may temporally ignore

¹³⁴ Tessier, *op.cit.*, p.1.

¹³⁵ Genesis, 1:2.

¹³⁶ Keller, 2003, *op.cit.*, p. 4.

the inconsistencies. We may freeze, like a rabbit in headlights, unwilling to change or grow for fear that all structures we have established will come apart. Because what we deny will eventually rise to the surface, because the vital power of our erotic energy will find a way to express itself, pressure builds up as the tension of contradiction increases. Eventually if we can no longer be what we are not and there is no cultural acceptable way to be ourselves, things come apart.¹³⁷

We are sexual beings, but we cannot be healthy sexual beings if we are in denial. This means the denial of everything that we truly are, our sexuality is our identity and our voice it is an integral part of our spirituality in a more dynamic, complex way than we are fully aware of. If we lose communion with ourselves then we lose communion with others. Tessier says that the process of undoing can be happening whilst we are being renewed so we don't necessarily have control over this process; it seems to be part of the paradox of the destructive/creative forces that occur throughout the cosmos. She tells us that

Life will not just line up like language, words in a row or like clothes on a clothes line. We do not first experience all the denial and chaos and crisis in our lives and then lower ourselves into a spiritual bath of healing, our suffering forever behind us. Even in the midst of the most chaotic storm of suffering and spiritual confusion, renewal and healing are going on. Whether we learn to nurture or negate it, the spiral of new growth is already present, like the seed that opens in the earth in the cold season, invisible but moving slowly toward the surface. Likewise, when we recognise our lives as healthy, integrated and well ordered, worn out structures may already be in the process of coming apart.¹³⁸

Tessier like Heyward and others demonstrate that it is the erotic within our nature which lead us out into relationality and for them into a fuller spiritual life. Many theologians have been rather shy in terms of spelling out what this may mean. However this is not the case with Robert Goss a gay Christian, priest and theologian, who speaks openly about the erotic incarnational value of Christ within his sexual relationship with his partner Frank. Goss writes of how this erotic incarnational intimacy is integrated within both their private life and the community in which they live. He says,

Every Sunday morning we made sexual love, followed by Eucharist at the dining room table for the two of us. Both sexual love and Eucharist were intimate moments of lovemaking...in sexual ecstasy we celebrated deep love, deep spirituality...there was a sense of oneness with each other, and a deep sense of Christ's presence in a dynamic energy flow embracing our bodies...there were times that I saw Christ's face within Frank's face, as I penetrated him in intercourse, as I was penetrated I felt penetrated by Frank and Christ. As I tasted Frank's body I tasted Christ's Body. We experienced a ménage à trios and the inclusive love of God...As we built our lives around lovemaking we grew in our sense of ministry...we grew in

¹³⁷ Tessier, *op.cit.*, pp. 15-16.

¹³⁸ *op.cit.*, p.3.

compassion as we learned to live passionately and act justly with each other...love making channels passion and energises action toward justice. Our sexual love did not propel us toward adopting children, but rather 'our lovemaking in bed and at the table freed us to serve others in need. ... We created an apostolic community of love for the marginalized and the disenfranchised...such procreativity in our relationship is not atypical in the translesbigay community.¹³⁹

Surely our intimate relationships need to be based on principles such as these, no matter who we choose to love and be in relationship with. These intimate connections can create a depth of understanding with ourselves in communion with others in meeting them where they are. This relationship transgresses the boundaries of heteronormative relations as queer theory does and at the same time perhaps offers an example to the Church that could form the basis of a sexual theology beyond the bounds of marriage ethics and 'pelvic orthodoxy'.¹⁴⁰

Queer Connections

Although queer theory is not a new concept, its application to theological discourse is fairly recent. Althaus-Reid argues that it is a necessary step since the classic discourses of liberation theology do not take seriously enough the realities of people's sexual lives and furthermore, they do not make the necessary connections between the sexual and economic realities of people's lives.¹⁴¹ This is not a view shared by all liberation theologians and even Althaus-Reid's co-author Isherwood, feels that feminist liberation theology has more flexibility and more potential to develop diverse and challenging outcomes than Althaus-Reid believes possible.¹⁴²

Althaus-Reid and Isherwood's book *'The Sexual Theologian'*¹⁴³ contains essays on sex, God and politics which demonstrate what they feel the relationship to be between all three. The application of queer theory to the historical subjects dealt with in the book helps epiphanise and give life to these subjects in a more embodied way and the history of the colonisation of our sexuality within the matrix of hetero patriarchy is challenged. Queer theory disrupts and subverts all that is considered sexually normal within all societies, cultures and traditions, it is described as, an umbrella term gathering together diverse issues within a

¹³⁹ Robert E. Goss, *Queering Christ: Beyond Jesus Acted Up* (Cleveland; The Pilgrim Press 2002), pp.22-24.

¹⁴⁰ Kathleen M. Sands, (ed.), *God Forbid: Religion and Sex in American Public Life* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.188.

¹⁴¹ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, (London: Routledge, 2003), p.94.

¹⁴² Panel debate at BISFT 'What's God Got to Do With it?' conference, *University of Edinburgh*, 2004.

¹⁴³ Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood, (eds.), *The Sexual Theologian: Essays on Sex, God and Politics* (London: T&T Clark, 2004).

common struggle; a resistance against heterosexual knowing¹⁴⁴ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's definition of queer

takes us away from the shameful, perverse definition that has led to prejudice and queer bashing. Queer is a continuing moment, movement motive-recurrent, eddying, troublant,. The word 'queer' itself means across, it comes from the Indo-European *twerkw*, which also yields the German *quer* (transverse)... The immemorial currents that queer represents are anti separatist as it is antiassimilationist. Keenly it is relational and strange.¹⁴⁵

Queer theory is now being used over a wide range of academic disciplines to provide an inclusive discourse for the sexually excluded. Queer theory meets at the edges of humanity with the excluded and the marginalised that have spilt out over the edges of the containers of heteronormativity. When queer theory meets theology, those that are at the margins become 'I' not 'We', because the unfolding of their diversity has become autobiographical and is contextually broad, therefore a collective description does not fit neatly around the shape shifting edges of their being. Althaus-Reid and Isherwood talk about the process of doing queer theology and the issues within it become a genre when considering the way people write theology. As a genre, queer theology partakes of the irony, humour and self-disclosure type of discourse of the camp genre and queer literature...a discourse of excess, an exaggerated style which puts together eroticism and humour.¹⁴⁶

In this, the application of queer theory to theology enables it to become 'a sexual theology with a difference'.¹⁴⁷ Queer theology is able to meet those that are at the margins who have been rendered invisible in their being because of who they are sexually in their bodies with great compassion, because it has the capacity to openly embrace diversity. These diverse sexual bodies of being are drawn into a community of diversity and solidarity with a hope of being accepted for who they are and where they are in their being. Queer theology does not want to draw what is being acknowledged in humanity at the edges to the centre to become an accepted as equal, queer theology strives instead for differentiation and plurality. Queer theology is in this sense a call for biodiversity in theology that is life and love in all its diversity, which ultimately 'transforms and renews all its praxis'.¹⁴⁸

When theology becomes queer the queerness of God comes into the frame. The transformative message of the gospel about God becoming flesh opens a doorway to critique

¹⁴⁴ *op.cit.*, p.3.

¹⁴⁵ Eva Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p.4.

¹⁴⁶ Althaus-Reid and Isherwood, 2004, *op.cit.*, p.6.

¹⁴⁷ *op.cit.*, p.7.

¹⁴⁸ *op.cit.*, p.3.

what the church has held onto far too tightly preventing growth and the enfleshed¹⁴⁹ statement of the promise of 'life in abundance' which, is the central message of the gospels, together with loving ones neighbour as one loves oneself. The transformation of an incarnational God throughout the gospels challenges traditional theology with a queer reflection through the mirror of queer theology. It is when the divine becomes flesh, flesh and blood becomes bread and wine and from human to cosmic spirit that the incarnation of redemptive praxis takes place¹⁵⁰ so there is no distinction in what flesh the divine becomes when God becomes human.

Queer theology helps us to realise that bodies, sexualities, sexual orientations and the performances of gender have been colonised by heterosexism, which pervades all dimensions of life in a way that oppresses all human beings including those who are heterosexual. Queer theology challenges the boundaries and wishes to propel us into a much wider paradise; one no longer walled and narrow like that in Genesis. Incarnation will not be confined.¹⁵¹ Queer theology is subversive, political and destabilises and undermines heteronormativity and traditional theological praxis. A queer hermeneutics of suspicion is created out of this subversive force that is queer theology as it focuses on 'theological closets, and reveals what has not been not been said or has been hidden'.¹⁵² The meta-narrative of metaphysics, the very foundation that the theological world is based on is challenged and shaken by queer theology as it moves beyond the bounds of this heteropatriarchal constraint. A queer hermeneutics of suspicion helps with rediscovering what is hidden or left out in history. Unpacking and unpicking can take place to reveal other truths of other people's lives. 'To queer the past implies to ask different questions of it. It implies to (que(e)ry) the past, attempting to find answers that go beyond what has traditionally been accepted'.¹⁵³ Bodies have been the geography of this occupation, the place where colonialism has kept sexuality captive. When we talk about colonization of sexuality and bodies, we are talking primarily about the colonization of identities and performances. The violence of this process is revealed in the process of normalization, which in this case, can be called heterosexualization whatever does not fit into the binary produced by heterosexism must be mistreated'.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ *op.cit.*, p.8.

¹⁵⁰ *op.cit.*, p.3.

¹⁵¹ *op.cit.*, p.7.

¹⁵² *op.cit.*, p.6.

¹⁵³ *op.cit.*, p.26.

¹⁵⁴ *op.cit.*, p.28.

As an example, I found myself being moved when I read Marie Cartier's article¹⁵⁵ on the nun Sor Juana and the recovery of her creative life, by looking at how important the acknowledgement of her sexuality/spirituality was in this. I also realised how the orientation of her sexuality and gender played a big part in her life relationally. The acknowledgment of her romantic and sexual relationships with women is dismissed by most authors who examine her life but Cartier argues that in doing this the fullness of her life is never truly found. Her sexual performance Cartier believes is that of butch. She further argues that unless we acknowledge that this is who she was then we lose the extraordinary layers of her poetry that hinge on her identity and her love objects - not just the love objects but the way in which she would imagine that love with them. Cartier is using queer theory to open a window of discourse to complete the picture of Sor Juana's life, it is a bigger picture than we have been led to believe by other historical writers because of her sexual orientation. Cartier believes historians have ignored it not because it is not there to be seen but because it challenges their experience and knowledge within the matrix of hetero- patriarchy, which, has been and is still the system that everything is dictated by. We do need another lens to view her life through and the lives of others like her if we are ever to get close to grasping the glorious array of incarnation of which the gospels speak. In seeing these lives differently we uncover more of the glorious outpouring of the divine.

Untangling and Loving Embodiment

As we can see the heteropatriarchal matrix has come down the centuries, coupling men and women within the Christian tradition and creating a pattern of being that has been woven so tightly that it is difficult to undo, but not impossible. The pattern that is woven is very tight and knotted Isherwood uses the analogy of Japanese knot weed to illustrate the deeply ingrained structures embedded in our tradition.¹⁵⁶ Sometimes in the undoing we create more knots that are hard to undo, unawareness is one of these knots. To be aware is the key, at a level of consciousness that will motivate us into action. The undoing has to be done, perhaps by the people who are within the weave, and the remaking has to be done by those who become aware during the undoing process.

Audre Lorde says 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house'.¹⁵⁷ She continues to say that 'they may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will

¹⁵⁵ Marie Cartier, 'The Necessity for Fiction in Resurrecting Queer Lineage: Sor Juana's Second Dream' in Althaus-Reid and Isherwood, 2004, *op.cit.*, Ch.1. pp. 16-25.

¹⁵⁶ Lisa Isherwood, 'The Embodiment of Feminist Liberation Theology: The Spiralling of Incarnation' in Beverly Clack, (ed.), *Embodying Feminist Liberation Theologies: A Special Edition of Feminist Theology* Volume 12.2 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), Ch. 1.p.141.

¹⁵⁷ Audre Lorde, *op.cit.*, p.112.

never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only genuine to those women who still define the master's house as their only support'.¹⁵⁸ What we need then is to find a different way, a new way of doing, to bring forth a new way of being and becoming within safe nurturing spaces that will enable growth for us all. Perhaps those spaces are inside and outside of us. Wherever they are there is still work to do within the structures and systems that have been created that are toxic to our development Heyward says, 'To solve structural problems we must dig deeply into the foundations of our common life to discover the rot and only then can we begin to reconstruct the house in such a way as to provide adequate trustworthy space for us all'.¹⁵⁹ We have to work it out together, relationally and it is an ongoing unfolding process. Surely it has to be an embodied process does it not? Embracing all the fleshly diversity in humanity? We are reminded in Toni Morrison's Novel '*Beloved*' of the holy woman Baby Suggs embodied healing power in this empowering extract not only describing but illustrating how integrated sexuality/spirituality can work. She shows a way to love oneself in a celebration of the flesh through creative imagination. She told them that the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine, that if they could not see it, they would not have it.

'Here', she said, 'In this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in the grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it...you got to love it. This is flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved...Love your neck; put your hand on it, grace it, stroke it and hold it up'¹⁶⁰

There is no greater time than now and for the future to embrace our flesh, our embodied selves against the attack within the 'heteropatriarchal matrix'.¹⁶¹ There is no greater time than now, as this investigation clearly notes the absence of children within this sexual/spiritual theological discourse. A time to ask and investigate how do we engage with this group of humanity that is clearly undervalued and marginalised within the cultural environment of the Church, traditional theology and society. As we have seen even the most progressive sexual theology which places our bodies, their erotic natures and their diverse expressions at the heart of incarnational becoming. Furthermore in the hands of some theologians it places this becoming within a cosmic dimension, yet still does not deal directly with children and so leaves a great deal of room for new thinking. However, through the selective process of this section, I believe I have shown how some theologians have moved us from what appeared to be an

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ Heyward, 1989, *op.cit.*, p.50.

¹⁶⁰ Toni Morrison, *Beloved: A Novel* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), p.88.

¹⁶¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York; Routledge, 1990), p.151.

impasse in sexuality and theology to a place of radical possibility in relation to our embodiment and its divine/human unfolding.

Section 2: The Spiritual Child in Christian Thought

A history of childhood can easily become a history of what adults have done to children. Children become the beneficiaries of adult actions. But children can also be agents in the making of their lives and their world¹

...any accurate and meaningful account of human beings and their relationships cannot be built on the thoughts and actions of adults but must also take into account the development and full humanity of children.²

The child's 'house has many mansions' – including a spiritual life that grows, changes, and responds constantly to the other lives that, in their sum, make up the individual we call by name and know by a story that is all his, all hers.³

As we saw in section one even the most radical Christian theology does not directly address the question of children. So how do we begin to imagine the full spiritual being and agency of children? Is this a real possibility when unequal power relations between adult and child seem a necessary requirement because of the dependency in relationship that lends itself to power over? History both theological and secular, in my view, reflects back to us those unequal power relations and the difficulties that are presented by them because of their disparity. My research shows that through both theological and secular history the embodied voices of children are marginalised and in part noticeably absent.⁴ This is curious considering that Christian theology has proclaimed from its beginnings Jesus' declaration that only becoming like a child is it possible for anyone to enter the Kingdom of Heaven!⁵ It seems that all sorts of imaginative interpretations and rhetoric have been placed on this declaration. I further suggest that we still have a muddled understanding of what this may mean, one of which included creating the concept of an 'adult child' of God and thus infantilising adult Christians and raising the question of where real children sit in this equation. I would suggest that Jesus chose a model of a child because he saw children as open, engaging, fearless, fluid, playful and energetically fuelled beings. It has even been argued and indeed in the gospel of Mark⁶ we are

¹ Hugh Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood: With the Voices of Children* by Michael Morpurgo (London: BBC Books, 2006), p.16.

² Marcia Bunge, (ed) *The Child in Christian Thought* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), p.28.

³ Robert Coles, *The Spiritual Lives of Children* (London: Cassell, 1996), p.308.

These references to the opening quotes do not differentiate between the gendered experiences of the child, however they do see the child's subjective potential so it is a starting point and opens a window of opportunity to look historically and socially into a child's world and in particular the female child.

⁴ Bunge, *op.cit.*, p.4. Cunningham, *op.cit.*, p.244; Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood* (London: Chaucer Press Ltd, 1973), p.6; OM Bakke, *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), p.56-7.

⁵ Matthew, 18:13, also Luke 18: 15-17.

⁶ Mark, 10:13.

told that they themselves represent the 'Kingdom of Heaven'.⁷ The question is did Jesus see children as spiritual? Those who write about children today would emphatically say that he did.⁸ In the context of Jesus' time, children were amongst the most marginalised and it was perhaps because of their silenced voices that he drew them into the spotlight. Jesus as a liberator of his time fought against political and religious injustices and sought to change the world in which he lived.⁹ In that world children were amongst the most disenfranchised and because of this they would have figured significantly in his world.

It is only within the last ten to fifteen years that theologians have started questioning children's spiritual lives and drawing our attention to their silenced voices. Within this section I will be exploring the negative impact theological history has had on the embodied becoming of generations of children who have been maintained at this marginalised level. I will observe what we have grown and yielded from that history, to see if there is anything worth saving from it. Individual and collective bodies will have many stories to tell if given creative channels to do so, much like the story I have told through my art about my personal embodied experience. This shows that bodies hold so much more than we realise from the impact of social injustice, within our cultural and traditional bounds in the west. Having a creative channel can enable a kind of alchemical process that holds the possibilities of turning trauma, suffering and painful experience into positive ways of becoming and living. Like turning shit into gold or into compost for healthy growth. Being creative is a way of reintegrating experience and embracing life in all its fullness which is what my paintings illustrate. I am however aware that this opens up a huge arena for serious discussions of global suffering on a grand scale and how we creatively deal with that on multiple levels is but another thread of the story.

The religious and the secular have been interwoven from the outset of Christian thinking, so both will have had a profound influence on the other regarding cultural and social construction of the gendered lives of children, from a western Christian perspective. Furthermore the valuing of children as full human beings within these religious and social parameters has been an exceptionally slow process as has spiritual recognition. Even the notion of childhood and what it means to be a child as Neil Postman has argued is a relatively new concept, declaring that

⁷ Vivienne Mountain 'Four links between Child Theology and Children's Spirituality', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 16:3, 201, 2011, pp.1261-269. [Accessed on 20th June 2012]. See also Coles *op.cit.*, p.39.

⁸ *Ibid.* See also David Hay and Rebecca Nye, *The Spirit of the Child*, (London: Harper Collins Publisher, 1998). Bunge, *ibid*; also Bonnie Miller-McLemore, *Let The Children Come: Reimagining Childhood From a Christian Perspective* (San Francisco: Josey Bass Publishing, 2003).

⁹ Heyward, 1999, *op.cit.*, pp. 137-141.

If we take the word children to mean a special class of people between the ages of seven and say, seventeen, requiring special forms of nurturing and protection and believed to be qualitatively different from adults, then there is ample evidence that children have existed for less than four hundred years. Indeed if we use the word children in the fullest sense in which the average American understands it, childhood is not more than one hundred and fifty years old.¹⁰

No sooner have we developed the concept of childhood Postman says, than it begins to disappear or at least the boundaries become blurred again within certain behaviours and expressions which are mirrored back to the adult world. He writes that 'numerous young adults and even children today are so willing to let go of their childhood',¹¹ shedding it like a skin, discarding it on the wayside into adulthood for the promise of something more exciting, brighter and perhaps, in part, to become more accepted, only to lose themselves within the multi-layered complexities of post modernity and global capitalism.¹² Postman continues saying that

the high watermark of childhood; 1850-1950 that enjoyed a slow rise in recognition of children being a biological category, not a product of culture. It was time of the birthing of the modern family...It was a time when children owned things...an assumed birthright, an ideal that transcended social and economic class.¹³

The complexities of this rapid transition are not easy to understand but I think it does go some way to reflect why we do not see the child or the value of their childhoods¹⁴ which I would argue are diverse and many. In contemporary society age has also become a definitive marking of transition. Twenty one used to be the age of celebrating the transition into adulthood but was downgraded relatively recently to eighteen, although both seem to be acknowledged. Sixteen is the age that you can smoke and have sex and at eighteen you can vote. This way of celebrating age is also relatively new and so has enjoyed a short period of time. Postman tells us that age was not considered important in America throughout most of

¹⁰ Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p.xi.

¹¹ I think this unconsciously comes from the deeply embedded influence about 'putting away childish things' 1 Corinthians 13:11. There is also an alluring promise of adulthood for some young people and even children below adolescence because of a momentary misconception of the child in relation to freedom seems to be that of not being answerable to anyone in authority.

¹² There are many competent writings about these issues, I have mentioned them because they are all too important and interrelated impacting on the spiritual lives of the child and all humanity and have dire consequences on environmental issues because of what we teach children and how we view and value them and their childhoods.

¹³ Postman, *op.cit.*, p.68.

¹⁴ By this I mean the awe and wonder that children when they see something that is new to them, the enthusiasm with which they engage in their playing out what they see and how quickly we as adults stop the development and nurturing of that process with the expectation of meeting educational targets that are governmentally designed and defined in order to obtain a future work force in a mechanistic way stunting the creative process that sustains their well being on so many levels.

the eighteenth century.¹⁵ Throughout the classical period the child's age and growth were marked by the father of medical science Hippocrates who divided the human life up into eight chronological phases, the first three were set aside for the child. 'The small child was *paidion* up to seven; the second was *pais* the child seven to fourteen and the third, *meirkon*, the young person fourteen to twenty.'¹⁶ Throughout history up until the nineteenth century, the age of the child was guessed or marked simply by bodily signs of maturation,¹⁷ which by today's standards would seem ludicrous because 'the child's age is celebrated with great enthusiasm, making it impossible to forget'.¹⁸ We do have this one ritual that marks our passing through the stages of ageing whilst celebrating the anniversary of our birth. There seems to be a concern from those writing about the spiritual lives of children that age is relevant in relation to when the children lay aside the spiritual aspect of their lives. David Hay says that a 'particularly significant finding of his research showed the extent to which 'children are embarrassed by their own spiritual awareness, particularly by the time they reached the age of ten'.¹⁹

The entanglement of postmodern spirituality has become a huge commodity, feeding consumerism and promoting individualism.²⁰ This has become a global affair influenced by western ideals which have often been colonised from eastern religions taking the most attractive bits and making them their own and in many cases profiting from this enterprise.²¹ This patch working of spiritual ideas has broken away from Christianity and other faiths with a movement toward new age spirituality, making it possible to have a 'spirituality of anything'.²² This movement is not necessarily embedded in radical thinking of acts toward social justice rather it is aimed at individualism which seems rooted in egocentrism. As a theologian, I suggest, that spirituality does need to be underpinned by creative theological thinking which is lacking in some new age thinking. As a feminist theologian with a view to doing things differently I would agree with what Heyward refers to what she considers a 'revolutionary spirituality'²³ that activates social and political change and quality of life. With new age ideologies the motivation to act justly becomes lost amidst the trappings of new age

¹⁵ Robert Cowley, "Their Work is Child's Play" *Horizon*, Vol. 13. No. 1, Winter 1971. p.14.

¹⁶ Bakke *op.cit.*, p.1.

¹⁷ Philippe Aries *Centuries of Childhood* (London: The Chaucer Press Ltd, 1973), pp.1-3

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ David Hay, 'Spirituality versus Individualism: Why we should nurture relational consciousness', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 5:1, 2000, pp.37-48. [Accessed on 27th March 2002].

²⁰ Socially we talk about our own spiritual lives 'I am spiritual' in terms of our in isolated self, individualism.

²¹ Statues of Buddha's and other eastern religious effigies are mass produced and sold in abundance all of which are symbols of a spiritual life. Although Christianity also has an open market place to sell its crucifixes and words of wisdom on post cards, posters and ornamental regalia.

²² Hay and Nye, *op.cit.*, p.30.

²³ Heyward, 1982, *op.cit.*, p.225.

memorabilia of the market place. Spiritual beliefs are projected onto the desired object rather than connecting to the embodied self in a reflective way. The consequences of which have meant a closing off to our fullest human potential and well-being of ourselves and others. I am not claiming that Christian spirituality is free of this, indeed it is embedded in pagan beliefs, which, is the oldest religion in the evolutionary process of humankind. Churches literally grafted themselves on to existing pagan sites and the symbolism of this ancient religion. It is in this process I see Christianity as part of humanities evolution. This can be seen in people who live their lives in the reflective value of faith and how that is acted out and lived in justice and love for oneself and one's neighbour, rather than what is just thought and believed. There is nothing to be gained through abandoning the Christian tradition for new age spirituality which may offer the same pitfalls that some fundamental strands of Christianity follow. It is in this argument against new ageism and fundamentalist Christianity that seems to have a profound influence on many, with its superficial spiritual offerings and quick fixes. Surely the deeper meaning of Christianity has more to offer spiritual lives in its evolutionary process as it journeys through the twenty first century and beyond. So how do we as a deeply Christian influenced society view the spiritual lives of children? Furthermore what effect does it have on their embodied experience and what space is there to express this experience creatively for wellbeing and life in abundance? Hopefully we shall gather a sense of this as we travel through this section by looking through an adult lens at their thoughts and ideas of the spiritual child.

Within the Christian religious tradition the spiritual development of children is subjected to a training regime that prepares them for their future spiritual lives. Sunday school in some traditions is set apart from regular church services and it could be argued this does not offer respect to the child as a spiritual being but rather sees the child as incomplete in terms of spirituality. Historically in the eighteenth and nineteenth century Janet Wootton tells us that Sunday school arrived in a two part movement, incorporating the writings for children, one was for catechism and the other was Sunday school. Children were viewed through the eyes of Christians as 'natural reprobates in urgent need of salvation and moral guidance'.²⁴ This would have played a large part in shaping the lives of children, as Wootton tells us, 'Children were seen as a mission field in their own right. Hymn-writers have bullied children, frightened them, blamed them for problems in their families, laid on them burdens of saving the world, and catechised them'.²⁵ On a lighter note Wootton brings to our attention the female hymn writer of the eighteenth century, Unitarian Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743-1825),²⁶ who wrote specifically for children against this negative backdrop of Protestant ideology about the nature

²⁴ Janet Wootton, (ed.), *This is Our Song: Women's Hymn Writing* (London: Epworth Press, 2010), p.93.

²⁵ *op.cit.*, p.xi.

²⁶ *op.cit.*, p.93.

of the child. Wootton says, 'Her texts raised questions and introduced social as well as moral issues. She did not regard children as naturally depraved from birth, or invoke terrifying images of hell for disobedience'.²⁷ Undoubtedly this would have had and still does have some influence on how children were viewed and treated as gendered spiritual subjects. We are just beginning to realise that how we think about, speak and tell the stories to the child does make a difference to their wellbeing. The consideration of the complex issues of gender difference remains to be questioned with the added burden of how children are thought of as spiritual subjects. Rebecca Nye tells us there are assumptions that 'children are too young for 'spirituality' and need to learn about faith first, or that children do not really experience the deeper aspects of life and so will not 'get' what religious language is all about,...'.²⁸ The second point she makes is that children are seen as a job lot and not differentiated by gender. Sunday school training ignores the opportunity for addressing gender issues that could help transform the child's understanding of diversity instead gender is limited to heteronormative practice. The analysis of heteronormativity and gender are one of the main issues that fails to be addressed seriously regarding theoretical process and practices within Christianity in relation to the spiritual lives of children. The area of gender and the acceptance of heteronormative practices as the dominating social model have a closed door to critical analysis in most of the work I have researched regarding children. It is timely that the door be opened to allow this process to filter through to mainstream thought on children's lives that are equally diverse and as complex as adults. Instead this analytical process remains in the adult world where it has had lifetimes of opportunity to accumulate complex problems of oppression and denial.²⁹ So the child has been neglected with regard to spirituality, agency, autonomy and doubly so being more gender specific, the female child's humanity and her becoming present.³⁰ How we who are female are present in the world is important because the female of the human species also has something to offer life in the world in relation to being spiritual, divinely incarnate, morally apt, justice seeking, ethically empowering and creative; heralding a multiplicity of talents; all of

²⁷ *op.cit.*, p.94.

²⁸ Rebecca Nye, *Children's Spirituality: What It Is and Why It Matters* (London: Church House Publishers, 2011). p.13.

²⁹ The accumulative process of denial of body selves which result in multiple problems regarding identity, gender performance and other body issues that are life threatening and can begin in childhood. i.e., eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia. See Isherwood, 2008, *ibid.* also Tessier, *ibid.* This is also the breeding ground for how we relate to and treat everything environmentally see, Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1983), pp.259-66; Rosemary Radford Ruether *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (London: SCM Press, 1992).

³⁰ My thoughts are sympathetic to who the female child is in relation not only to her forbearing mothers but also to the male child when both genders have been (and I would argue still are) sharply defined. This definitive ideology is so deeply embedded which makes being a child and female lost literally in the language of our embodied experience through the heteronormative constructs of patriarchy that dictates both the feminine and the masculine.

which in the adult feminine has been largely ignored, minimalised, misunderstood or dismissed throughout the theological discourse of history. Anne Phillips brings the story of Loruhamah³¹ into view, she is Hosea and Gomer's only daughter of their three children. The relevance of this story for Phillips is that the treatment of her in relation to her brothers represents the fate of girls, from birth to puberty written both in the bible and acted upon today in the church. Her distinctive characteristics, history and identity, Phillips says, 'are fused with those of more dominant males, and so the unique part she has to play in the story goes unrecognised. Thus making reclamation of her life a necessity'.³² This is just one of many stories of girlhoods within Biblical text that remain inscribed in a negative denigrated way which keeps her either hidden or unnoticed and definitely marginalised.

Maintaining children in a marginalised position is not difficult because of the very nature of their dependency on adults. This is obviously because of the young child's need of loving, nurture and sustenance at the beginning of life. To live and maintain that life is crucial for the individual and for society since it enables and equips them to be productive, valued members of society and to lead a full meaningful life as an adult. For the Christian faith living a full meaningful life would involve leading a spiritual life in God and Jesus. Whereas over the past decade education seems to have viewed a meaningful life of the child under the auspices of social 'citizenship'³³ and one wonders what if anything this has to say about children's spiritual lives.

Of course children in the west are far removed from the harsh life of the classical world and many other parts of the world with their crushing poverty, high mortality rate and lack of education, food, clothing and healthcare, However we still have the poor, even in Britain we have children who are living in poverty, in 2011 a report in the *Guardian* reminds us that in the UK approximately 3.8 million children live in poverty.³⁴ Child Poverty UK 2012 gave an estimate of 3.5 million with an expected rise of 400,000 in the coming years³⁵ Poverty is just one of the many issues³⁶ children have to deal with. We know from adult surveys that poverty impacts on women differently from men and so we can assume that it also impacts on the

³¹ Hosea. 1,3,6.

³² Anne Phillips, *The Faith of Girls: Children's Spirituality and Their Transition into Adulthood* (Surrey, Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2011), pp.1-2.

³³ See Ron Best (ed) *Education, Spirituality of the Whole Child* (London: Cassell, 1996).

³⁴ Cathy Scott-Clark and Adrian Levy interview with five children, *Guardian Weekend*. [Accessed on 24th June 2011].

³⁵ M Brewer, J Browne and R Joyce, Child and Working Age Poverty from 2010 to 2020, *Institute for Fiscal Studies*, 2011.
http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/child_poverty_2012.pdf [Accessed on 18th September 2012].

³⁶ Other issues relate to relational values, drug and alcohol abuse, eating disorders, HIV Aids, STD's and unwanted pregnancy in teenagers.

female child in the same way and will still have significance in relation to matters of spiritual development as well.

Christian feminist theologians have been addressing issues of women's inequality since the nineteenth-century with relatively little attention to children due to the continued need to bring equality and liberation into the lives of women.

Antoinette Brown who studied theology at Oberlin College in 1837, examined Paul's epistles with feminist questions and in the 1890's Elizabeth Cady Stanton together with a committee of 20 women wrote commentaries to expand the interpretative framework of those major passages in the Bible which referred to women, resulting in the Women's Bible.³⁷

I feel now that childhood has to be a key starting point for change and for finding new ways of moving forward into a grace filled future. It is here that the foundation of learning and taking on new ideas can be at its most energetic, excitingly creative and fruitful, it is where we begin to learn how to fit in or not, to society and religion. It is my hypothesis that the patterns of contemporary child rearing lie deeply woven within the rich tapestry of Christian cultural history and this affects how we value the child as spiritual beings. Therefore I will start with an examination of the Church Fathers and their views on the spiritual life of the child.

Early Christian Views – Early Fathers

Early Christianity bought about its own complex tensions and difficulties within spiritual lives when it met with the existing principles of patriarchy, for example the preaching of the imminence of the Parousia, sexual abstinence and maintaining a virginal state in preference to being married as proposed by the Apostle Paul, which had a negative effect on the declining population of Rome where having children was crucial in order to re-populate the city of Rome and support the Empire. 'Famine, poverty and death remained an important reminder that being a child and living through the prospective years of childhood was a risky business'.³⁸ Peter Brown, whose research shows an in-depth exploration relating to sexual renunciation in early Christianity, tells us that both women and men were mobilised by the Emperor Augustus to use their bodies for reproduction, reminding us that the pressure on young women was enormous.³⁹ They were expected to have at least five children each and approximately fourteen years was the age at which Roman girls were married,⁴⁰ although it has been noted

³⁷ B.Zikmund, 'Feminist consciousness in historical perspective', in Letty M. Russell (ed.), *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), p.23.

³⁸ Brown *op.cit.*, p.6.

³⁹ *op.cit.*, p.8.

⁴⁰ B. Rawson (ed.), *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives* (New York: Cornell University Press 1986), pp.1-57.

that girls as young as twelve⁴¹ were often married. It seems that the division between the rich and poor was as common then as it is now, because the privileged and the eccentric (usually male) had the freedom to do what they pleased with their sexual drives.⁴² This shows again the polarisation of class and gender within the Roman society that affects mostly women and children. It seems that out of this cultural environment, thoughts of younger generations and their possible futures lives seem to be sadly neglected and mostly undocumented as do relationships between mother and child. Children's individual thoughts and feelings were also not recorded so they remain invisible and voiceless. With the arrival of Christianity and the promise of new life and new beginnings with the immanence of the Parousia, another cycle of thought and understanding was set in motion. A wave of certainty that Jesus was going to return very soon made the whole idea of having children within those early years irrelevant within society, to keep oneself virginal and sexually abstinent was more important than anything else for religious spiritual perfection.

During these often violent times within the first few centuries of Christianity certain adult principles would have impacted on the child's experience, two major ones were religious spiritual perfection and martyrdom. Aristocratic women gave up their children in order to follow religious perfection to prepare for the world to come with the second coming and becoming martyrs in the process. The head of the Roman family (the paterfamilias), would try to talk the women (their daughters and wives) who left their children into coming back under the threat of shame to him and the rest of the family. There are stories recorded of martyrdom which show that women were tortured and killed by wild beasts in the gladiators arena of the Roman world, these acts of self-sacrifice are equally recorded as acts of bravery by Church Fathers such as Jerome. Another extreme case found in the writings of Origen is of potential child sacrifice. This was by the request of a Theban man who had charge of his young son but wanted to enter a monastery to attain religious perfection

the leader of the religious order Abba Sisoës asked him if he had anyone in the world and the man replied only my young son the religious leader suggested that he throw his son in the river if he wanted to live a religious life and the man was on the verge of doing so when Abba Sisoës the monk prevented him from doing so and let him join the monastic community.⁴³

These self sacrificial acts would have meant that the child was either sacrificed to martyrdom⁴⁴ or left in safekeeping with remaining members of the family which was more often the case

⁴¹Epitaphs in Rome told the life story of person whose tomb it was - Mary Beard, *Meet the Romans*, Series 3 BBC2 <http://www.bbc.co.uk> [Accessed on 17th April 2012].

⁴² Brown, *op.cit.*, p.6.

⁴³ Bakke, *op.cit.*, p.272.

⁴⁴ Church Father Jerome. Encouraging ones own child to die for what she, the woman and mother believed to be a matter of faith which created another horrific story of child martyrdom. These children

leaving the deserting Christian adult fleeing in pursuit of faith and loyalty to God. There are extensive records written by the early Church Fathers of these acts which I cannot do justice to in this section. However the following description will help to illuminate the impact that these sacrificial acts had on the remaining families the result of which would have lasting devastating effects. All imperial subjects were forbidden to become Christians and severe penalties befell those that disobeyed this law.

Perpetua a noble woman by birth was one such martyr who along with four other catechumens, Felicitas her slave, Revocatus, Saturus and Saturninus were 'arrested imprisoned and martyred in Carthage on 7th March 203 along with another self-confessed Christian Saturus. These records were transcribed by Septimius Severus (193-211)'.⁴⁵ Perpetua was allowed to nurse her young son up until her trial. Her father pleaded with her on the morning of her trial to recant her confession. He was a pagan so such a sacrifice may have seemed incomprehensible to him. However, her mother and two of her brothers were Christian who, whilst understanding the sacrificial act would also have been deeply distressed by it. We are told that

Perpetua's father, carrying her child in his arms, approached her again and attempted, for the last time, to induce her to apostatize; the procurator also remonstrated with her but in vain. She refused to sacrifice to the gods for the safety of the emperor... On 7th of March, the five confessors were led into the amphitheatre. At the demand of the pagan mob they were first scourged; then a boar, a bear, and a leopard, were set at the men, and a wild cow at the women. Wounded by the wild animals, they gave each other the kiss of peace and were then put to the sword. Their bodies were interred at Carthage.⁴⁶

Perpetua left behind a motherless child however, the impact of her death would have affected the whole family because the children that were orphaned were generally brought up by close family relations as was the setting then.

Christianity clearly brought a change to the treatment of children with regard to exposition, infanticide,⁴⁷ abortion and sexual abuse. Early Christian writings such as the Didache influenced the prevention of these acts against children. The Didache was the Lords teaching through the Apostles to the Nations and was made up of sixteen chapters. I refer to the first and second commandment in chapters one and two that are relevant to the subject of

on the instruction of soon to be martyred adult involved the child being tortured, beaten and eventually beheaded. Bakke, *op.cit.*, Ch.7., pp.260-279.

⁴⁵ J.P., Kirsch, *Sts. Felicitas and Perpetua*. In The Catholic Encyclopaedia. (New York: Robert Appleton Company. 1909).

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ The Twelve Tables was the earliest Roman legal code introduced.. 450 BC., it legally permitted fathers to expose any female infant and any deformed male infant see Michael J. Gorman *Abortion and The Early Church* (Danners Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1982), p..25., and Lawrence E. Stager "Eroticism and Infanticide at Ashkelon" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 17 (July-August 1991). pp. 34-53.

the 'child' which first commanded to 'love God then love your neighbour'.⁴⁸ The child was the parents nearest neighbour and so owed an obligation and a duty of care to the child that would implicate their duty to ensure the child's spiritual education

...There are two ways, one of life and one of death; but a great difference between the two ways. The way of life, then, is this: First commandment you shall love God who should not occur to you, do not also do to another. Part of the second commandment of this is... "You shall not commit pederasty...you shall not murder a child by abortion nor kill it at birth..."⁴⁹

In this Bakke says 'the foetus is recognised as a child from the moment of its conception and is part of God's creation; suggesting that this is the first example of early Christian writing on creation theology'.⁵⁰ This however would be very different to how creation theology is viewed today.⁵¹ The recognition of the child as part of God's creation also shows a change in an attitude toward the child as a human being within early Christianity.

I want to draw attention to the piece of the text on pederasty⁵² within the Didache. This is an early text in Christian history that one would have thought would have made men of that period think twice about committing this act against boys. The relevance of this enquiry is about the value of children, power relations and their spiritual embodiment. The possible change that Christianity offered to make in this area seemed slow to be realised. My point of interest is what happened between the newly professed young boys and the older monks within the confines of monastic communities toward the end of the fourth century. In this context, sexual relations between anyone were strictly prohibited through the Christian teachings of celibacy and the spiritual life. The discrepancy for me lies with what we are told of the advice given to older monks imparted by Basil of Caesarea (329-379)⁵³ with regard to sexual attraction toward the younger monks (boys). I mention sexuality here in relation to the context of supposedly spiritual celibate lives

It is frequently the case with young men that when rigorous self restraint is exercised, the glowing complexion of youth still blossoms forth and becomes a source of desire to those around them. If anyone is youthful and physically beautiful, let him keep his attractiveness hidden until his appearance reaches a suitable state.

⁴⁸ These early Christian writers related this to the fact that children were the nearest neighbour to their parents; therefore they must love their children as their neighbour as they themselves love God. Bakke, *op.cit.*, p.156.

⁴⁹ The Church Fathers Didache. <http://www.newadvent.org> [Accessed on 12th June 2011].

⁵⁰ Bakke, *op.cit.*, p. 116.

⁵¹ Matthew Fox, *Original Blessings* (Sante Fe, New Mexico: Bear and Publishing, 1983).

⁵² Didache, 'Second Commandment: Gross Sin Forbidden', Chapter 2, p.2 <http://www.newadvent.org> [Accessed on 12th June 2011].

⁵³ J. Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe From the Beginning of the Christian Era to the 14th Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press Ltd., 1981). pp. 159-60.

Sit in a chair far from such a youth; in sleep do not allow your clothing to touch his, rather, have an old man between you. When he is speaking or singing opposite you, look down as you respond to him, so that you do not by gazing on his face take the seed of desire from the enemy sower and bring forth harvests of corruption and loss. Do not be found with him either indoors, or where no-one can see what you do, either for studying the prophecies of Holy Scripture, or for any other purposes no matter how necessary.⁵⁴

It is hard for us to believe that these sexual relations did not actually happen, otherwise why record or mention it at all. Bakke tells us that the very fact that the Council of Elvira had to issue a canon about the penalty to be imposed on those who had sex with boys indicates that this did happen among these cloistered Christians.⁵⁵ Thus confirming that these acts against children continued under a relatively new Christian religion. It is important to note this and not deny it, not just because of the disparity of power in these relationships, but with the changes and good intentions that Christianity brought, it also came with mind and body dualism. which will have contributed to displaced eroticism and suppressed an important part of the human spiritual ability to express desire, pleasure and compassion for one another leading in some cases to abuse.

From late first century to the fourth century thoughts of the child, their qualities and nature had begun to be documented by the Church Fathers. O.M. Bakke and other historians and theologians write expansively about the thoughts and ideas of these early patristic writers and what qualities they attributed to children such as Christian ideals of innocence and sexual purity. At this point I would like to try to capture and illustrate some of these thoughts combined with biblical texts that the doctrinal teachings of the Latin Church were built on. Written within these numerous prescriptive texts were ideas of moral and spiritual formation and ways to convey Christian ideals to the young.

Clement of Alexandria (DOB unknown 215 d.) a Greek theologian wrote extensively about the qualities of the child, in what seems a positive light compared to those of his contemporaries in the surrounding pagan world. The two main scriptural texts to illustrate the value of the child's innocence as a salvific model for the adult Christian were the sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew and Luke,

'Jesus said...Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven...'⁵⁶

'...Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.'⁵⁷

⁵⁴ *op.cit.*, pp.147-8.

⁵⁵ Bakke, *op.cit.*, p.144.

⁵⁶ Matthew 18:3.

These were principal texts open to reinterpretation, to be approved and preached to the adult children of God by the Church Fathers as a model to become. This controlling of the adult through infantilising them in this way it could be argued, continues to disable and disembody. It seems that real children and childhoods were not addressed directly and were only set as an example for adults. However parents were also told to use these teachings to set examples to their children, to maintain their childlike qualities, to prevent them from falling into sin and to protect the soul. Clement says 'It is a good thing, I reckon, to leave to posterity good children. This is the case with children of our bodies. But words are the progeny of the soul'.⁵⁸ Clement also used other texts drawn from Hebrew and Christian scriptures, to demonstrate what constituted a Christian child. This was again an idealistic, theoretical view of what a child should be although I suspect it will have had a consequential impact on the real child of that world. The loaded expectations of those prescriptive writings of such polarised perfection of separating spirit and matter would again follow as a paradigm for the Christian adults, he says

The child (νήπιος)⁵⁹ is therefore gentle (ἡπιος)⁶⁰ and therefore more tender, delicate, and simple, guileless, and destitute of hypocrisy, straightforward and upright in mind, which is the basis of simplicity and truth. For He says, "Upon whom shall I look, but upon him who is gentle and quiet?"⁶¹

To reiterate, this is a positive view of the child compared to that of the surrounding pagan world and it is the freedom from reason and rationality that makes the child valuable in Clement's eyes. Clement draws further on the analogy of young animals within biblical texts to support his argument of the child's innocence, simplicity, gentleness and tenderness, he wrote with reference to the words of Jesus

Let my lambs stand on my right, *Matthew 25:33* He alludes to the simple children, as if they were sheep and lambs in nature, not men; and the lambs He counts worthy of preference, from the superior regard He has to that tenderness and simplicity of disposition in men which constitutes innocence. Again, when He says, as suckling calves, He again alludes figuratively to us; and as an innocent and gentle dove, *Matthew 10:16* the reference is again to us. Again, by Moses, He commands two young pigeons or a pair of turtles to be offered for sin; thus saying, that the harmlessness and innocence and placable nature of these tender young birds are acceptable to God⁶²

⁵⁷ Luke 18:16.

⁵⁸ Clement of Alexandria, 'The Stomata' Book 1 ch.1, para.1, p.1. <http://www.newadvent.org> [Accessed 11th June 2011].

⁵⁹ (νήπιος) child of both gender

⁶⁰ (ἡπιος) - gentle and tender

⁶¹ Clement of Alexandria 'The Paedagogus' Book 1 Ch.5, para.7, p.4. <http://www.newadvent.org> [Accessed 11th June 2011].

⁶² *op.cit.*, Ch.5, para.3, p.2.

Children are the epitome of sacrificial value that would please God due to their capacity for obedience and loyalty. Going further he draws on the relationship between the colt and his father he draws on the Hebrew Scriptures saying

He (God) figuratively calls us colts unyoked to vice, not broken in by wickedness; but simple, and bounding joyously to the Father alone; not such horses as neigh after their neighbours' wives, that are under the yoke, and are female-mad; *Jeremiah 5:8* but free and new-born, jubilant by means of faith, ready to run to the truth, swift to speed to salvation, that tread and stamp under foot the things of the world.⁶³

These qualities are to be acquired by the adult, who is infantilised to become the child of God in order to attain a loving dependent relationship with the Father. The child here is used as a template for the adult and so falls short as a teaching for the 'real child'. In fact we are not hearing about the experiences of the real child, only the child of Clements imagination in relation to the scriptures. This may then leave us wondering with a strange curiosity about the infantilisation of adult believers in this way.

Origen (185-253) Bakke tells us, adopts and develops the thinking of his predecessor Clement on childhood innocence and simplicity and also agrees with how children function as positive examples for adult Christians.⁶⁴ Origen's reflection is based on the writings of Paul to the Corinthians and the Gospel of Matthew which Bakke comments on as illuminating⁶⁵ which I take to mean that these texts show the reader how absorbed these men were in their own assumptions. Clearly it is another adult projection synonymous with the formulaic child of the Church Fathers imagination

if any one who is a man mortifies the lusts of manhood, putting to death by the spirit the deeds of the body, and always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus, *2 Corinthians 4:10* to such a degree that he has the condition of the little child who has not tasted sensual pleasures, and has had no conception of the impulses of manhood, then such an one is converted, and has become as the little children. And the greater the advance he has made towards the condition of the little children in regard to such emotions, by so much the more as compared with those who are in training and have not advanced to so great a height of self-control, is he the greatest in the kingdom of heaven... like the little child which Jesus took to Him; since especially in such the Christ is, and therefore He says, Whosoever shall receive one such little child in My name receives Me...⁶⁶

One cannot help noticing that the gender of the child here is synonymous with the adult male in the line '*impulses of manhood*', whereas Clement did not differentiate between

⁶³ *op.cit.*, Ch.5, para.4, p.2.

⁶⁴ Bakke, *op.cit.*, p.63.

⁶⁵ *op.cit.*, p.64.

⁶⁶ Origen, Commentary on Matthew 18:5 Book XIII Ch. 16. <http://www.newadvent.org> [Accessed 11th June 2011].

genders for those who were in 'Christ.' Although of course it can be argued that he thought both male and female are recognised in the male gender when they are joined in Christ. Again when we see that Clement explicitly includes the female child who he explains like the male child is innocent and free from sexual passion and desire which could perhaps be seen as a momentary attempt to deal with early sexism issues within his commentary of '*pedagogus*.' Latterly he quotes a classical comedy writer 'Menander'⁶⁷ of that period with regard to this comparison which appears to me to be quite patronising and disregarding toward the female child through a twenty first century feminist theological lens

There the rewards of this social and holy life, which is based on conjugal union, are laid up, not for male and female, but for man, the sexual desire which divides humanity being removed. Common therefore, too, to men and women, is the name of man. For this reason I think the Attics⁶⁸ called, not boys only, but girls, παιδάριον,⁶⁹ using it as a word of common gender; if Menander the comic poet, in *Rhapizomena*, appears to any one a sufficient authority, who thus speaks: — "My little daughter; for by nature The child (παιδάριον) is most loving."⁷⁰

This of course is again about the asexual nature of the child that adults need to emulate. I also note further that the removal of sexuality is used in terms of the feminine by both becoming male in Christ and through spiritual wholeness.

Irenaeus (his DOB is Unknown -202d) also held the view of childlike innocence and asexuality and his references for this is Adam and Eve in their pre-fallen state, again it is an idealistic predetermined view of childlike innocence,

And Adam and Eve - for that is the name of the woman - *were naked and were not ashamed*;⁷¹ for there was in them an innocent and childlike mind, and it was not possible for them to conceive and understand anything of that which by wickedness through lusts and shameful desires is born in the soul. For they were at that time entire, preserving their own nature; since they had the breath of life which was breathed on their creation; and, while

⁶⁷ Athenian-born Menander (c. 342-291 B.C.) wrote over 100 plays, his first at age 22. He is the most famous writer of what is described as Athenian new comedy. Eight of his comedies were prize-winners. He imitated Euripides and was in turn adapted by Roman writers of comedy, Terence and Plautus. Unlike the classical writers who wrote mythical plots or political commentary, Menander chose as topics for his plays aspects of daily life with happy endings and themes inspired by Aristotle's *Ethics*. Menander's characters, shown with psychological realism, were stern fathers, young lovers, crafty slaves, and more, who couldn't resort to the deus ex machina of tragedy to settle their problems. <http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/dailylifesocialcustoms/ig/Poets/Menander.htm> [Accessed on 9th June 2011].

⁶⁸ Attics - 1. Of, relating to, or characteristic of ancient Attica, Athens, or the Athenians.

2. Characterized by purity, simplicity, and elegant wit: Attic prose.

n. The ancient Greek dialect of Attica, in which the bulk of classical Greek literature is written. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Attics> [Accessed on 9th June 2011].

⁶⁹ In Greek παιδάριον does not differentiate gender it could be argued hermeneutically in the light of patriarchal overtones that the boy is named first with the female child as an afterthought. The personification of animals enables a degenderisation of the sexes.

⁷⁰ Clement, Book I, *op.cit.*, Ch.4., p.5.

⁷¹ Genesis, 1:2-25.

this breath remains in its place and power, it has no comprehension and understanding and therefore they were not ashamed, kissing and embracing each other in purity in the manner of children⁷²

Whilst the breath of God remained in them they were untainted from all desire and thus spiritually whole. For these early Fathers the relationship between sexuality and spirituality seems to be clear, with the former being understood to have a devastating impact on the latter. The innocence of children then is a misreading of the child's sexual nature, which I have suggested is embodied from birth is to be celebrated and not to be ashamed of. The over emphasis on sexuality in relation to childlike innocence illustrated in this way holds an unhealthy discord.

Tertullian (160 – death unknown) seems a little ambiguous with regard to childhood innocence as can be seen in his interpretation of Jesus in Matthew. He uses the text to illustrate the importance of children coming to know Christ before they can become Christians

The Lord does indeed say, "Forbid them not to come unto me". Let them "*come*", then, while they are growing up; let them "*come*" while they are learning, while they are learning whither to come; let them become Christians when they have become able to know Christ. Why does the innocent period of life hasten to the "*remission of sins*"?⁷³

A brief interlude of innocence for the child it seems is acknowledged here in relation to them not having sinned of their own accord. Tertullian's interplay with the original sin of Adam weighs heavy on the soul of everyone. He thought that every soul was impure and goes on to say 'Every soul, then, by reason of its birth, has its nature in Adam until it is born again in Christ;...' ⁷⁴ Spirituality seems like something beyond the bodies attainability unless it can rid itself of such a burden. Hence Christianisation is imperative to being saved and helped to live a good life. Innocence of the child is short lived, as soon as the child learns to articulate what he wants to say and reason sets in sinning is inevitable says Tertullian. This is because the first sin comes from Eve who was responsible for the fall of man and because of this she is the 'Gateway to the Devil.' The burden on the female child then is implicitly greater since she is the daughter of Eve and according to Tertullian most things about women, their voices, their hair their hands are filled with their foremothers deceptive and fallen nature.

Gregory of Nyssa (Date of birth unknown; 385 or 386 d.) in his treatise *De Infantibus qui Praemature* was mainly concerned with infant baptism due to the high death rate of

⁷² St Irenaeus Bishop of Lyons *Dem.* p. 43: 14. http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0130-0202,_Iraeneus,_Demonstration_Of_The_Apostolic_Preaching,_EN.pdf [Accessed on 12th June 2011].

⁷³ Tertullian, 'Baptism: Of Persons to Whom, and the Time when, the Baptism is to be Administered', Ch.18. <http://www.newadvent.org> [Accessed on 12th June 2011].

⁷⁴ Tertullian, 'A Treatise on the Soul De Anima', Ch. 40: 1. <http://www.newadvent.org> [Accessed on 12th June 2011].

infants. It was because of this that Gregory felt theologically challenged. Bakke reminds us that Gregory is struggling with the classical problem of combining belief in divine justice with the idea that everything that happens is dependent on God's will.⁷⁵ He came from a deeply religious family. 'His mother Emmelia was a martyr's daughter and two of his two brothers were also Bishops, the eldest was Basil of Cæsarea and another was Peter Sebaste. His eldest sister Macrina was known for her piety and became a saint⁷⁶ and was also Basil and Gregory's teacher. Rita Brock and Rebecca Parker tell us that she spoke about the world as a 'dynamic, fluid and diverse'⁷⁷ place. It seems that her embodied way of seeing did not influence her brother Gregory in the same way, whose comments about the soul demonstrate a dualistic disembodied nature. He wrote eight Homilies on Ecclesiastes and in them he taught that the soul should rise above the senses and that true peace is only found in contempt of worldly greatness.⁷⁸ He also wrote about what happened to the soul of infants dying prematurely 'whether it is through suffocation, exposition or else through his own accord ceasing to live through his own weaknesses⁷⁹ and argued why this was God's divine will. Gregory thought that because reason had not yet entered the body of the infant then it was not yet human. However he thought this state of lack sent this soul back to the goodness of God without judgement because the soul had not yet been tainted. He wrote a piece about this through an eloquent long drawn out argument about the wisdom of God and the retribution of the soul that had not lived so could not be purged by fire or blessed by the dew of the earth. So because this soul had not struggled for virtue or for reason by a process of deliverance from evil or salvation from sin, this blessed soul just 'passes to the blessed lot at once'.⁸⁰ However the soul of a child who lives has to run the distance of life's journey fighting evil and sin thus gaining virtue through reason until the soul is reunited in God.⁸¹ While he may be more compassionate towards the child who dies young he is nevertheless as concerned about how they develop and the ability they have to become immoral as is the view of other Fathers of the early Church. There seems to be no celebration of the natural spiritual goodness of children even with talk of their innocence which appears to be viewed as something that will inevitably pass.

⁷⁵ Bakke, *op.cit.*, p.73.

⁷⁶ H. Leclercq, *Gregory of Nyssa*, In the Catholic Encyclopaedia (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910). p.2.

⁷⁷ Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Anne Parker *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of this World for Crucifixion and Empire* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008), p.151.

⁷⁸ Leclercq, *op.cit.*, p.3.

⁷⁹ Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, (eds.) William Moore and Henry Austin Wilson (trans.) *From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series Vol. 5. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1893).

⁸⁰ *op.cit.*, p.6.

⁸¹ Leclercq, *ibid.*

John Chrysostom (c 347-407 d.) did not write so much about the nature and quality of childhood he did however acknowledge their innocence but this he was quick to announce as a very short period, he concentrated more on education and the upbringing of children which he goes into great detail about in his *De Inani Gloria*. In this he was pragmatic about the responsibility of parents in their role and contribution toward the child's Christian formation. Chrysostom has a clear goal '...they are to be formed so that they will live in accordance with what he defines as the ethical-moral ideals in Christianity. The definitive goal is to equip children for the kingdom of God.'⁸² *'De Inani Gloria'* is an extensive educative treaty in which Chrysostom declares the child is innocent, but is more interested in maintaining the child's soul for God within a strict rigorous regime that he says weighs heavy on the parents, 'he compares the child's soul to a city surrounded by a wall with four gates which must be maintained in good working order'.⁸³ The maintenance of the city is sustained by the 'Word of God' which is constantly to be spoken to the child through hymns, psalms and stories, it is the father who is to uphold this statute and the mother is to carry these duties out as second in command⁸⁴ to make sure the child emulates the example set by both parents. The child's body is to be controlled and censored through various senses to protect the soul from worldly corruption, "The body shall be the wall, as it were, the gates are the eyes, the tongue, the sense of smell, and, if you will the sense of touch."⁸⁵ Every sense mentioned here is a gate to the soul which is the dwelling place of God. There are several instructions given to guard each gate, the tongue is the busiest and must be engaged in the word of God at all times, he speaks of the word as being 'the "Golden bolts" of the gate that guards the tongue against words that are insolent, slanderous, foolish, shameful, common or worldly'.⁸⁶ Instead the word of God must revolve on his (*the child's*) lips at all times and never cease 'even on his walks abroad, not lightly or incidentally, nor at rare intervals, but without ceasing'.⁸⁷ This total controlling device makes one wonder about the fearfulness of the senses Chrysostom had on the notion of worldly desire and pleasure should infiltrate the body and defile the purity of the spirit of the child. What a projection of fear upon the embodied spiritual life of a child even before it has realised the fullness of its happy tactile sensuous nature. His instructions were, that this gate must be "kept barred" at all times, nothing weakens the appropriate attitude in a soul more

⁸² *op.cit.*, p.188.

⁸³ *op.cit.*, p.189.

⁸⁴ *op.cit.*, p.198.

⁸⁵ John Chrysostom, *De Inani Gloria*, 27. http://www.strobertbellarmine.net/books/Chrysostom--Vainglory_and_Children.pdf [Accessed on June 15th 2012].

⁸⁶ John Chrysostom, *Homily on Matthew*, 73:3. <http://www.newadvent.org> [Accessed on June 15th 2012].

⁸⁷ Bakke, *op.cit.*, p.199.

than “a pleasure in sweet odours.” No-one should give the boy perfume.⁸⁸ The gate that represents the eyes is to guard against what is seen.

Chrysostom warns against certain things that the boy (*the child*) must not see when he is out of doors...parents must not let him (*the child*) go to the theatre...so as not to be corrupted by what he may see there...take care to shield his eyes from anything that may draw him (*the child*) away from true morality...most important of all Chrysostom emphasises that he (*the child*) will have little contact with women...and he becomes more austere as he goes on to say ‘instil into him (*the child*) a resolute spirit against womankind.’⁸⁹ (*My italics*).

There is so much that Chrysostom has to say about parents and their responsibility toward the child. However, mothers it seems are always put in a subjugated position as we can see through Chrysostom's words

Let women learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over man, but to be in silence. And Adam was first formed then Eve. Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in [through the] child-bearing if they continue in faith and charity and holiness in sobriety”.⁹⁰

The child is also spoken about in the masculine throughout the treatise and as an aside at the very end we hear that this applies to girls too, 'Let his (*the child's*) mother learn to train her daughter by these precepts'. The marginalising of both mother and daughter in this statement is fairly obvious.

Jerome (342 – 420) was well known for his child rearing advice on how to bring up a female child whose life is to be consecrated to virginity. He writes a letter to Laeta giving advice⁹¹ about how she should raise her daughter Paula. The letter contained instruction for a strict training regime to enable her formation to begin to live her Christian life as a virgin. Jerome's austere list highlights abstinence, deprivation and fear. Christina Landman points out Jerome's views of, 'disembodiment as redemption and therefore as the final goal for education'.⁹² Landman argues that Jerome was central in the formation of 'the negative views put on the female body which originated in the 4th century and dominated Christian thought in the middle ages, the protestant reformation and the modern missionary period up to the

⁸⁸ *op.cit.*, p.194.

⁸⁹ *op.cit.*, pp.194-95.

⁹⁰ John Chrysostom. Homily 9: 1Timothy ii., in Philip Schaff (ed.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 14. Charles Marriott, (trans.) (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1889.), pp.11-15.

⁹¹ Christina Landman, C 2005, 'Educating the body of the female child: feminisms in dialogue with Jerome', *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, vol XXXII, no 1, pp. 147-161.

⁹² *op.cit.*, p.147.

present'.⁹³ Without ever engaging with the child personally Jerome instructs as follows; 'Thus must a soul be educated which is to be the temple of God. It must learn to hear nothing and to say nothing but what belongs to the fear of God'.⁹⁴ Although we can see that he pleads with Laeta to place her daughter in his charge

Moreover, if you will only send Paula, I promise to be myself both a tutor and a foster father to her. Old as I am I will carry her on my shoulders and train her stammering lips; and my charge will be a far grander one than that of the worldly philosopher; for while he only taught a King of Macedon who was one day to die of Babylonian poison, I shall instruct the handmaid and spouse of Christ who must one day be offered to her Lord in heaven.⁹⁵

Meanwhile his hope is put in this long directive list that will eventually achieve the required goal of piety and chastity and closeness to God. She must be at all times protected from all impurity and negativity in her early years by someone with high moral integrity and she must be closely watched.

The girls time must be spent reciting sweet psalms while her tongue is still tender'...when Paula is a little older she must not listen to secular music played by instruments like the organ, pipes and lyre...when she starts to form words she must choose letters that form sentences with words that hold spiritual meaning for example names of prophets and apostles...⁹⁶

Restriction of playing with boys even whilst still young and being deprived of material and decorative items that would enhance her looks were a sure way of maintaining her virginity. If she has a male teacher when she is older, Christian or otherwise she must be chaperoned at all times even when she has to ask him religious questions. The dislocation and isolation continues as she is instructed to stay away from public life, because of the temptations that this life holds. Even the clothes she wears have to be spun by her and she is allowed no finery with regard to clothing, jewellery or tinting her hair.⁹⁷ She is to be deprived of material things even the clothes she makes and wears are function only to keep the cold out. Her mother's supervision is called for, Jerome says 'Leave her no power or capacity of living without you'⁹⁸ which Bakke agrees is more 'about control...leading to dependency...So that her daughter will feel frightened when left by herself.'⁹⁹ Bathing is only advised in her childhood. He warns about her seeing herself naked when she is older for fear of exciting herself and being sexually aroused; for fear of leading her away from procuring spiritual wholeness. He explains that a

⁹³ *op.cit.*, p.148.

⁹⁴ Jerome - Epistle 107:4. p.3. <http://www.newadvent.org>

⁹⁵ *op.cit.*, 107:13., p.8.

⁹⁶ *op.cit.*, 107:8., p.6.

⁹⁷ *op.cit.*, 107:5. p.4.

⁹⁸ Bakke, *op.cit.*, p.185.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

virgin at that age “should blush and feel overcome at the idea of seeing herself undressed.”¹⁰⁰ Paula is to mortify her body with vigils and fasting, and bring it into submission.¹⁰¹ From the age of seven onward she must practice a comprehensive and regulated devotional life.¹⁰²

Jerome even prescribed the kind of food Paula was to eat which was very humble, minimalist and frugal, the menu consisted of herbs, wheaten bread and occasionally fish. Paula must never eat her fill at table because she must be capable 'on the moment to begin reading or chanting'¹⁰³ reflecting the difficult correlation between a full stomach and the spiritual life. This has echoes of the twenty first century eating habits of young girls which I think is a curious reflection of patriarchies control over female bodies. The feelings of purity and cleansing are what young girls experience as spiritual, when they purge their bodies of food.¹⁰⁴ It is clear that for Jerome spirituality is about purity of body brought about through isolation from the world or very strict control in terms of actions in it for young girls. Today we would understand such control as abuse and question the man who gave it however it has laid the foundations for our views on spiritual development over many centuries.

Augustine (354 – 430) is central to the early church and his writings are foundational to the churches' teachings and traditional theological thought today. His view of the child contradict most of the previous Patristic Fathers views of the innocence of the child. The closest to his ideas on children is Tertullian who thought that the pre -fallen state of Adam and Eve is the closest to the innocence of the infant child, whose is innocent is lost once it becomes rational and is able to reason. However Augustine thought that children did not escape the contagion of the first sin. It was only because of their size that they were unable to sin. The only sense of innocence in an infant is related to its physical weakness-that is its inability to harm others. He even speaks of his mother nourishing him in her womb with sin.¹⁰⁵ He asks because he cannot remember when he started sinning 'Where was I, your servant, ever innocent? Where Lord and when?'¹⁰⁶ He relates each six stages of his own childhood development and asks questions about his own actions what he obviously cannot remember. (because indeed who can?) He observes in babies that he seems to randomly encounter and builds up a picture of babyhood and childhood. There are certain contradictions in his thoughts about babies' physical weakness and their inability to sin or harm others. Bakke notes this in relation to Augustine's use of their greed for the breast and their jealousy to demonstrate their lack of innocence. Although well fed they react with screaming anger at

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

¹⁰² Jerome, *op.cit.*, 107:9., p.6.

¹⁰³ *op.cit.*, 107:10., p.7

¹⁰⁴ Isherwood, 2007, *op.cit.*, p.97.

¹⁰⁵ Augustine, *Confessions Book 1*, Ch.7:12, p.5. <http://www.newadvent.org>

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

their fellow nurslings who are in the greatest need of food.¹⁰⁷ So however sinful their behaviour, size stopped them from physically hurting anyone leaving Augustine with big questions about innocence. He uses examples like this to illustrate the first stage of childhood and talks of his own childhood in this way. Within the second stage of life the child accomplishes the art of speech or as Augustine tells his story, 'I was no longer an infant that could not speak, but a chattering boy.'¹⁰⁸ To be able to speak was the beginning of a communicative life, that took the child through to the age of fifteen, the process of which took him into the rational world of adults, where he was expected to take responsibility for what he said and for the actions that came with that, 'and advance deeper into the stormy fellowship of human life'¹⁰⁹ Augustine emphasises that the gravity of the sins will increase as the child grows up to adulthood. For these same sins, 'as we grow older, are transferred from governors and masters, from nuts, and balls, and sparrows, to magistrates and kings, to gold, and lands, and slaves, just as the rod is succeeded by more severe chastisements'.¹¹⁰ So there is continuity in this desire to sin both in the adult and child strengthening his argument that children are sinners and that no-one is innocent. Augustine's *Confessions* are full of heart wrenching admissions which must have taken all his time and energy to think about, write and strive to overcome.

The Church Fathers' interpretations of biblical texts in relation to childlike qualities are one of the few sources we have to rely on. However pure and holy the child appears it would seem nevertheless that children were seen both consciously and unconsciously as empty vessels to be poured into and to be projected upon in order to meet the requirements of spiritual perfection for adults. I fail to see an empathetic connection to a real child or the embodied child that Jesus may have been talking about. This just seems in my view a change of ideals since the founding of Christianity but still with little to do with the humanity of the child. Control of the child seems to be paramount and in this way spirituality is thought to be nurtured and developed but I wonder if some of the dehumanising tactics used could foster anything that we might recognise as spirituality. They would certainly foster religiosity and fear but I wonder how deeply they draw out, what I would understand as the inner spirit of the child. There is no doubt that these good intentions did procure a certain value for children but I still feel that some of the original hope of the Christian message was lost under the rhetoric of the Fathers.

Contemporary Christian Views

¹⁰⁷ Bakke, *op.cit.*, p. 91.

¹⁰⁸ Augustine, *op.cit.*, 8:13., p.6.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *op.cit.*, 1:18:30. p.12.

Today it seems that children have a voice and are able more than ever to say how it is for them. We are told that children have agency and a voice through 'Children's Rights',¹¹¹ 'Every Child Matters'¹¹² through the 'Well Being Report'.¹¹³ Within the education system we have the 'Education of the Whole Child' which addresses the spiritual and moral development of the child as a new initiative with a view to looking at 'citizenship'.¹¹⁴ The child has a voice to speak their experience within abusive situations through 'Child Line'¹¹⁵ and other agencies who are concerned with care of the child. Controversial discourses are increasingly taking place on the exploitation of children within all levels of society, the market place and across many of the academic disciplines including theology, as already suggested earlier. The latter being slow in its line of investigation compared to other disciplines in this subject area.¹¹⁶ Never has there been a more relevant time to talk about children and childhood and their spiritual lives. Their entrance into the public arena in my view and the view of many others is prolific and it is up to us as responsible enabling adults to nurture the infinite possibilities of this long awaited creative moment in time.

On the theological front it is also a good time to begin to hear voices that have been silent and this includes that of the child. Feminist liberation theology has opened up a dialogical door for the sexual/spiritual life of the child because it has broken the bounds of sexual and spiritual silence for women. I know from personal experience that we cannot uncritically accept even what seems to come from morally just and good sources. I am left with many unanswered questions about gendered equality, power relations, choice and the role of the church in these matters. Children mirror and reflect everything they witness and experience, with an openness that can soon become closed due to the tight boundaries we as adults impose on their lives in the name of progress of society and Christian ideals. Within their bodies we witness broken fragments of history reflecting back to us the objectification and colonisation¹¹⁷ of bodies that are done unto rather than respected and related to in a

¹¹¹ House of Lords, House of Commons Joint Committee on Human Rights - *Children's Rights* 25th Report of session 2008-2009. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt200809/jtselect/jtrights/157/157.pdf> [Accessed on 14th September 2011].

¹¹² Presented to Parliament by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury by Command of Her Majesty, *Every Child Matters*, 2003. www.tes.co.uk/teaching-resource/Every-Child-Matters [Accessed on 14th September 2011].

¹¹³ Part of UNICEF UK. <http://www.unicef.org.uk/Latest/Publications/Child-well-being/> [Accessed on 16th September 2012].

¹¹⁴ Don Rowe 'Common schools, good citizens: towards a public discourse model of moral education' in Best, *op.cit.*, Ch. 5., pp.68-79.

¹¹⁵ Free Confidential helpline for children and young people in the UK www.childline.org.uk [Accessed on 16th September 2012].

¹¹⁶ Bunge, *op.cit.*, p.7.

¹¹⁷ See Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood, (eds.), *Controversies in Body Theology* (London: SCM press, 2008).

mutual way. This should make us cautious even when dealing with Christianity. For example, Carter Heyward reminds us that 'the Christian Bible, like any resource, may become a spiritual license to build the world in the image of one's own self. This tendency to present "The Word of God" as one's own agenda – myopic and non - relational - is commonplace among those who hold civil and ecclesial power.'¹¹⁸ It seems that the Jesus of relationality and his role as liberator remains kidnapped and as Heyward's says, still needs rescuing from 'those who are right'.¹¹⁹ Alternatively we can look toward liberating him from a fixed identity into the 'free flowing Christ'¹²⁰ of which Isherwood speaks. It is this free flowing unfolding Christ of process and life in abundance I hope to find in contemporary writings about children and I will remain cautious about the Christ of the right that Heyward alerts us to.¹²¹ That Christ is the one who will simply repeat the constraints of the past, the bodily negativity and narrow limits that I feel are not healthy for children's spiritual development.

History informs the present and the future on multiple levels both personally and politically and without the background we cannot see the foreground and I agree with Isherwood when she says that much of what we experience in the secular world 'has deep theological and religious roots'.¹²² This is why my main focus has been the female child and the way in which she has been viewed throughout theological history. As we have seen through the Church Fathers this has been noticeably clear. Even now I would argue that we still rely on this disparity of power within Christian child rearing practices and teachings by perpetuating the myth that God is male and that all that is female is inferior.¹²³

Incarnational theology which has been developed by feminist theologians¹²⁴ gives us an opportunity to explore ways of making this an embodied Christological possibility for girls, as they grow in their becoming as divine subjects within Christian communities which they themselves embody radical human equality. This incarnational process has to include all that we are and experience in our flesh working through difficulties that blind us and make us hard of hearing to the lived reality of marginal lives, one such group as we can see have been silenced are children in all their experiential diversity. It is here that I am reminded of the incarnational possibilities for those who embody the Christ they claim to profess,¹²⁵ in a song

¹¹⁸ Heyward, 1989, *op.cit.*, p.77.

¹¹⁹ Heyward, 1999, *op.cit.*, pp.11-12, 155-6.

¹²⁰ Isherwood, 1999, *op.cit.*, pp.128-150.

¹²¹ Heyward, 1999, *op.cit.*, p.1.

¹²² *op.cit.*, p.2.

¹²³ Catholicism remains intolerant of women and female priests as do some ministers within the Anglican Church and would rather move to another denomination and creed rather than meet a women in an authoritative ecclesial position.

¹²⁴ Isherwood and Stuart, 1998, *op.cit.*, Ch.6. pp.114-31.

¹²⁵ Isherwood, 1999, *op.cit.*, p150.

sung by Catholic priest John Michael Talbot.¹²⁶ This is a song that reflects an incarnational Christ for all. The song is taken from the words originally written by Teresa of Avila (1515-1582).

Christ has no body now but yours
No hands no feet on earth but yours
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet
Yours are the eyes, you are his body
Christ has no body now but yours
No hands no feet on earth but yours
Yours are the eyes through which he looks
Compassion on this world
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.¹²⁷

These are also the hands, feet, eyes and bodies of children. Not only are we who are Christian called to be this radical divine/human incarnation¹²⁸ but called also to action it in a justice seeking way. It will be interesting to see to what extent these new possibilities in theology are reflected in the writing about children's spirituality.

New growth and new connections¹²⁹ for flourishing are important to future generations, these generations also need to take forward another way of doing and being to make the difference a reality. This future vision for the female child really does need new discourse along with re-claimed and re-imaged resources for her future flourishing, given her/story within his/story. Dualistic thought throughout theological history has prevented us from getting to grips with understanding children, childhood, gender and also their sexuality and spirituality.¹³⁰ This important integrated union is what gives children a sense of who they are in their lives, the culture and the world in which they live.

The essays in *The Child in Christian Thought* edited by Marcia Bunge plunge us back into patriarchal history, where most of the authors endeavour to glean Christian values from

¹²⁶ John Michael Talbot's Collection, *St Teresa's Prayer*, Double CD EMI 1995.

¹²⁷ http://www.journeywithjesus.net/PoemsAndPrayers/Teresa_Of_Avila_Christ_Has_No_Body.shtml [Accessed on September 9th 2011].

¹²⁸ Isherwood, 'Will You Slim For Him' in Althaus-Reid and Isherwood, 2008, *op.cit.*, Ch.8, pp.174-206.

¹²⁹ Catherine Keller, 'Forces of Love: The Christopoetics of Desire', in Andreas Schuele and Gunter Thomas (eds.), *Who Is Jesus Christ For Us Today: Pathways to Contemporary Christology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), pp.115-133.

¹³⁰ When I speak of sexuality and spirituality in children I am not promoting sexual promiscuity in children and genital sexual acts. What I am suggesting is that the raw erotic energy of the divine that is innate in all human beings including children dunamis it encompasses our sexuality but also drives our passion for justice, joy, pleasure, creativity and love of one another. It also brings us to consciousness and relationality with one another and all sentient life on the planet. It is also the power within as opposed to exousia which is power over the power of authority without. Heyward, 1982, *op.cit.*, p.48.

the Church Fathers teaching on how to bring up children in the Christian faith.¹³¹ Practical theologian Bonnie Miller-McLemore is an exception and offers a valuable critique of motherhood and mother/child relationship relying on feminist theologians Rosemary Radford Ruether, Valerie Saiving, Paula Cooley, Beverly Wildung Harrison and others. She also uses feminist theologian Carol Christ, and feminist writer and poet Adrienne Rich. McLemore acknowledges the damage that living within the confines of patriarchal thinking has done to the value of mother/child relationships; she defends the mother/child and mother/daughter relationship upholding the idea of preserving the wisdom that comes from these relationship that are still not valued by the Church.¹³² McLemore advocates that these relationships deserve to be celebrated as creative life giving activities.¹³³ However, the church still chooses to ignore them because of the age old body-spirit dualisms that continue to disrupt the creative flow of women's bodies, which I would argue hold more than the ability to give birth. This major problem has been caused, McLemore says, 'by lumping together women and children as a subordinate group'.¹³⁴ I have to agree, that this lumping together has restricted the subjectivity of both groups and McLemore clarifies this when she says that unless the needs of the mother are recognised within her role of mothering then neither can the child's needs be.¹³⁵ This is not because they are the same needs, which automatically come together as a neat package, rather these are needs that interact and relate to one another as the relationship unfolds from its beginnings, in this way they are inseparable. One will always affect the other so recognition and respect of this valuable interdependent relationship is crucial for the well-being of both mother and child. This has not, I would argue been heeded or respected by the masculine model of patriarchy. McLemore's primary consideration within her work she says is 'the spiritual embodied child's experience and hearing the voice that comes from that experience'.¹³⁶ She says 'the challenge is to articulate even more boldly and directly a stronger and fuller theological vision of children and our obligation toward them'.¹³⁷ Here I would challenge what McLemore means by this theological vision because again whilst we continue to work within the same frame, movement is restricted and becomes stuck. To move on and meet this obligation that she suggests without any clarity of what that means in the bigger picture of life is difficult. We need to perhaps ask what is at stake and critically question whether Christian values within its present theological teaching can hold together this theological vision for children alone. This is in addition to meeting an obligatory act

¹³¹ Chrysostom, Book 1, *op.cit.*, Ch.5:1., p.1.

¹³² Bonnie Miller-McLemore, 'Let The Children Come Revisited' in Bunge, *op.cit.*, Ch.17, p.453.

¹³³ *op.cit.*, p.455.

¹³⁴ *op.cit.*, p.451.

¹³⁵ *op.cit.*, p.453.

¹³⁶ *op.cit.*, p.472.

¹³⁷ *op.cit.*, p.473.

toward the future embodied lives of children, given the ecological crisis that threatens our future lives on the planet.

Bunge agrees with the need for the 'participation of the child in decisions that are made about them'¹³⁸ however the essays in her book reference male theologians of the past such as Aquinas, Augustine, Calvin and Luther amongst others suggesting that children were 'not as marginalised as much as was first thought.'¹³⁹ To support this statement she suggests that we need to reconsider what these particular theologians have to say about the child because 'they have helped shape theology and the Christian Church'.¹⁴⁰ She continues to say that children also had been treated very kindly and thoughtfully and had even been well protected at times under these Christian teachings. There are truths in this but I would want to argue that this also depends on how we imagine marginalisation within the tradition. Christianity at its best, still is an important tradition that supports, loves and cares for the needy, the down trodden, the hungry, the poor and still does support the spiritual lives of many. Bunge notes that Christian theologians from history have considered seriously the child's position and how children should be treated, taught and directed spiritually and they have admonished parents who do not train their children in the right way.¹⁴¹ She states that the 'notion of original sin and the 'breaking the will of the child', are complex and do not automatically lead to harsh punishment of children and when set in a wider theological framework this has fostered a more humane treatment of children'.¹⁴² Whilst there are truths in what she says, I wonder what their value and relevance is for today's context. I do not feel she pushes the boundaries wide enough when grounding her work in the world of the Church Fathers, for example, it is not clear to me whether Bunge agrees with this historical theological idea of breaking the child's will. If she does then I would have great concerns for the child's well-being. This is because of the correlation between will and spirit and why would one want to break something that is innate and needed for supporting resilience and sustaining life itself, let alone for living life in abundance. For the Church Fathers the will may have been seen as the seat of the devil, whilst for those following Heyward and other incarnational theologians it may be viewed as a central component of *dunamis*. So whilst I realise the importance of maintaining the foundational source of the Christian tradition in the gospel of Jesus, I would like it to be clear here about what we are maintaining regarding the female child her empowerment and her spiritual life. Bunge is mindful in her work of the multiple

¹³⁸ Bunge, *op.cit.*, p.28.

¹³⁹ *op.cit.*, p.9.

¹⁴⁰ *op.cit.*, p.8.

¹⁴¹ *op.cit.*, p.10.

¹⁴² *op.cit.*, p.9.

agencies¹⁴³ that can and need to contribute to the future well-being of the child and the way we nurture the child's spiritual development. However it seems such discourses between other disciplines and Christian values have agreement difficulties with regard to the nature of the child's development within gender equality issues, sexual orientation, the stories¹⁴⁴ that are told to children and what truths they hold with a view to the growing reality of what the future may hold for them. So is Christianity mature enough and ready to come out of the light of fixed truths which often exclude the female child and into the unfolding lives of divine/human female children that offer an open ended future full of possibility? I realise that Bunge is writing from a USA context, where the rights of the child are not even accepted within political legislation¹⁴⁵ for fear of interference with US law and family values¹⁴⁶ and because of the lack of confidence in the child's ability to reason. Perhaps we see here the echoes of the past in the present, of those deep religious convictions that still heavily influence law and society.

Bunge notes herself that the Church Fathers do not seem to know what it means to be a child¹⁴⁷ and she does advocate the need for change within Christian theological thinking. She says that some theologians and ethicists alike are beginning to use the 'child as a lens to re-evaluate the Christian tradition and to retrieve elements that can strengthen the Churches overall theology and practice today.'¹⁴⁸

The spiritual life of the female child is not mentioned as a valued member of community within the essays in Bunge's work which is a point to be noted but is not unexpected as the essays deal with the writings of the Church Fathers.¹⁴⁹ There is a very noticeable qualitative difference between gender even if we just begin with the way the male child is still the model description of the child.¹⁵⁰ As already noted history has both ignored and marginalised women the female child and children alike at the cost of their full humanity which still remains in the balance and furthermore has excluded other categories of humanity

¹⁴³ Marcia Bunge, 'Beyond Children as Agents or Victims' in Trygve Wyller and Usha S. Nayar (ed) *The Given Child: The Religious' Contribution to Children's Citizenship* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), pp. 28-9, 48-9.

¹⁴⁴ My thoughts are sympathetic toward the idea that we cannot hear biblical narratives on their own there are other stories that they are intertwined with such as mythology, traditional stories that embrace a healthy imagination together with scientific narratives that hold the possibilities for deep meaning for all of humanity.

¹⁴⁵ Bunge in Wyller and Nayar, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

¹⁴⁶ <http://ideas.time.com/2012/01/24/why-is-the-us-against-childrens-rights/> [Accessed 14 September 2012].

¹⁴⁷ Bunge, *op.cit.*, p.4.

¹⁴⁸ *op.cit.*, p.30.

¹⁴⁹ The ongoing rhetoric of training girls for domesticity, piety, good husband material (not to mention misogyny) is clear in these essays have remained within theological discourse for centuries and even now echo the same tune, 'women still juggle their lives to suit others and not necessarily their own needs'. McLemore in Bunge, *op.cit.*, pp.446-473.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*

from its teaching.¹⁵¹ Christianity needs to readdress its source, to reconsider where its traditional roots have come from and where the spirit will blow next. My criticism rests largely on the male writers of theological history and the ecclesial males that they are writing about, who consider themselves to have total authority over mother and child relationships and disregard the mothers natural, close, embodied relationship with the child and her intuitive, nurturing role in the child's life.¹⁵² The consideration of what the child needs in the way of nurture purely from a male theological perspective would be alien to feminist thought as it has been for defining woman. This is demonstrated through many feminist theological¹⁵³ and philosophical writings which include Mary Daly's significant '*Gyn/Ecology*'¹⁵⁴ and also artist and therapist Bracha Ettinger, '*Matrixial Borderspace*'.¹⁵⁵ They both in different ways refer to the colonisation of women's bodies in utero and childbirth. Daly writes unshakably about the neglected position of women after they have given birth and in their role of child rearing practices which, are still embedded and maintained within a masculine frame. This is to be considered not only within Christianity but in psychology and the sciences, all of which by example will have an effect on the female child's idea of what it is to be female in the world. This is where an educative praxis is crucial in making her aware of the disparity of her spirit/sex and gender within public religious, social and political forums making sure she knows her incarnational value. I would argue, that whilst male theologians of the past remain the authority and mainstay of writing, thought and praxis today we will not have the radical equality that is needed to 'sustain future generations and lives'.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ There are so many excluded categories that are still invisible and missing within Christian teaching that has professed to be inclusiveness yet shows such a limited vision regarding diversity. Feminist Liberation Theologians who have written about this subject need to be acknowledged to lift the fog of cultural and historical amnesia.

¹⁵² Miller-McLemore in Bunge, *op.cit.*, p.446-473

¹⁵³ Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'Religion, Reproduction and Violence Against Women', in Lisa Isherwood and Rosemary Radford Ruether, (eds.), *Weep Not For Your Children: Essays on Religion and Violence* (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2008), pp.7-25.

¹⁵⁴ The whole of her writings are indicative of her anti patriarchal ideas and in particular those from *Gyn/Ecology*. Daly, *op.cit.*, pp.37-73.

¹⁵⁵ Bracha L. Ettinger, Griselda Pollock, (ed.), *The Matrixial Borderspace* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2007); also Griselda Pollock, 'Mother Trouble: The Maternal Feminine in Phallic and Feminist Theory in Relation to Bracha Ettinger's Elaboration of Matrixial Ethics/Aesthetics' *Studies in the Maternal Article* 1(1) 2009.

¹⁵⁶ What I mean by this statement is that I think the disparity of power between genders is at the seat of broken relationships with the planets eco system and other life forms. I will show this in section three. Young people are also walking away from the Church including young women who look for spirituality within New Age ideologies that are like fairy dust and have no deeply informed theological substance; but just quick fixes that take away vital energies that can be used for sustainable futures outside of global capitalism which is destroying our eco system. Equally though not to be ignored or forgotten I am reminded through recent conversations with a friend, a Catholic mother her children 'walked' as she names it, but yet have not walked from faith, maintaining the social gospel of Jesus through the work that they do outside of the walls of the Church.

Children have been thought of as empty vessels according to Lloyd de Mause¹⁵⁷

research and innocence and purity which Richard Kincaid suggests has eroticized them within adult thoughts and desire. He says that

As for Innocence: at one point a theological trope, in the nineteenth century it became more and more firmly attached to the world and to this world's sexuality. It was, further, a characteristic that outran any simple physical manifestation: innocence became a fulcrum for the post-Romantic ambiguous construction of sexuality and sexual behaviour. On the one hand, innocence was valued deeply and guarded by criminal statutes (albeit bendable ones); on the other hand innocence was a consumer product (*with a reference to pears ivory soap 99.44% pure 0.56% substance*)...We were trained to adore and covet it, to preserve and despoil it, to speak of it in hushed tones and bawdy songs.¹⁵⁸

This has led to complex attitudes that are buried within the adult psyche and can prove harmful to the child because of the ambiguous ideas behind it and because of the integral connection to the spiritual life of the child which in this analysis is female. I would suggest from an incarnational perspective children are anything but empty and are as much a valuable part of the body of Christ as adults are. Rather we dampen the child's spirit with all the ideologies we impose upon them and with masculine hegemonic ideologies that define them. If we really think the child is truly the stuff of the '*Kingdom of Heaven*' then we need to celebrate that. Feminist liberation theologians have for a long time been partaking in co-creating the Kingdom that is here and now and is always becoming. '*The Kingdom of Heaven is within*' Luke 17: 20-21 and with each generation so it changes its perspective to fit the context of time and space as it evolves along the lines of our humanity.

Gender has to have critical analysis even in children because of a heteronormative mindset that has fixed identity. This is damaging because we are never fixed in time and space, rather we are always becoming, free flowing and fluid in that process. That fluidity can be felt in the body through sensations if we allow ourselves to feel and connect to the rhythm of that movement. Sensation can give us an indication of blocked energy within the body this is how I would describe where my art comes from through the experiential nature of sensation and energy.¹⁵⁹ The maintaining of safe permeable boundaries that give space for healthy spiritual growth and fluidity is needed rather than fixating on an end point towards which children have to be moulded for their salvation. From a Christian perspective I would ask what happened to

¹⁵⁷ Lloyd De Mause, The Emotional Life of Nations, *The Evolution of Child Rearing*, online article, 2002, pp.1-20.

http://www.psychohistory.com/htm/el08_chidrearing.html [Accessed on 4th Feb 2002].

¹⁵⁸ James Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child molesting* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), p.15.

¹⁵⁹ Peter A. Levine and Ann Fredrick, *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma* (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 1997), p.67; Ian McNaughton, *Body, Breath and Consciousness : A Somatic Anthology* (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 2004), pp.357-65.

Jesus the one who stood at the margins and walked with the marginalised, talked and ate with the poor and the social outcasts and appeared to have no end point for them other than a promise of overflowing life in abundance.¹⁶⁰

Nurturing the Spiritual Child within Academic Theory and Educative Praxis

The spiritual lives of children have become of great interest to researchers within the academy and education since the launch of the '*International Journal of Children's Spirituality*' in 1996. The International Association for Children's Spirituality (IACS) was launched in 2006 due to the success of the journal and was established by Clive and Jane Erricker and Cathy Ota, of the 'Children World Views' project. All three together began writing about educating 'the whole child'¹⁶¹ within the last decade. The journals main premise written by President of IACS, Jack Priestly tell us, was to

inculcate a spiritual dimension into education, not only to respect religious ideals, but also to include spiritual lives outside of them. Even to acknowledge the spiritual within much of the academic world at the present time is often to invite scepticism or even ridicule. What, after all, is it? Can you define it? These are the challenges constantly put forward. The only honest answer to this latter question must be a categorical, No. The spiritual is describable but not definable for to define is to set limitations, to draw boundaries. By contrast it was Jesus of Nazareth who was reported as commenting that the spirit, bloweth where it listeth. In other words it is a concept of constant motion or at least of potential motion which can on rare occasions be stilled. Its most common images are those of fire, wind and running water: they cannot be contained or made static without ceasing to be what they are.¹⁶²

This is a good starting point if it is realised and put into action by government bodies, teachers as a praxis that can engage with and maintain the child's embodied spiritual life.

David Hay and Rebecca Nye whose research primarily looked at the 'The Spirit of the Child' indicate that the spiritual lives of children can be found within 'relational consciousness, which, is an encouraging start for a feminist theologian who is looking for mutuality in relationship the spiritual/sexual child within her research. Nye specifically sees the relational

'as a compound property' reflecting two patterns – first, as an unusual consciousness or perceptiveness, relative to other passages of conversation by the child; and second, conversations expressed in a context of how the child related, to the material world, themselves, other people and God¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Heyward, 1999, *op.cit.*, p.27.

¹⁶¹ C. Erricker, J. Erricker, C. Ota, D. Sullivan, and M. Fletcher, *The education of the whole child*. (London: Cassell, 1997); also Jane Erricker, Clive Erricker and Cathy Ota *Spiritual Education: Cultural, Religious and Social Differences* (Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, 2001).

¹⁶² Jack Priestley article on *Children's Spirituality*, 2008 www.childrensspirituality.org [Accessed on 4th June 2012].

¹⁶³ *op.cit.*, p.38.

The four dimensions and order she classifies them in are 'between the self and God, the self and other people, the self and the world and children's consciousness in relationship with themselves.'¹⁶⁴ I would argue that this is the other way around beginning with the child's conscious inseparable relationship with the divine and that is there is no distinction between the two, they are one. Carter Heyward's *dunamis* self/human knowing would begin with embryonic sensual awareness, touching the other internally, beginning relationship with other/mother, in the womb,¹⁶⁵ the self, the other and the material world. Whatever happens after that depends on how she is greeted and treated as she enters the external world and how the internal relationship that has already begun is supported according to the relationships need and is not just the projection of an alien system. Then, when she is ready, whatever God/divinity she chooses to follow will come from her own understanding, needs and desire. Relational consciousness from this point can then be nurtured on this continuum which will undoubtedly be one of uncertainty because of what it is to be human in the world and the cosmos. Hay follows the thinking of anthropologist Alistair Hardy, who held the view that spirituality is innate in all human subjects so is biological thus making religiosity secondary to that experience.¹⁶⁶ This is perhaps a more open ended view and has been an invaluable contribution to opening an investigative window, but for my work it is weakened by the absence of gender analysis and the lack of a theological foundation. Hay and Nye are under no illusion of a secular life that promotes individualism and how it can be such a social destructive force to childhood spirituality.¹⁶⁷ In this light I would just like to remind the reader that Christianity has also played its part in this destructive process.

This destructive force is embedded in the multi-layered complexity of patriarchal values that has disembodied lives within its system of dualism.¹⁶⁸ Educationalist, Ronald Morris links the lack of engagement within education with body mind dualism that Nelson¹⁶⁹ speaks about, which he agrees has permeated western society and it seems we are both in agreement that without the connection of the spiritual with the sexual/sensual body disembodied lives will continue. The spirit does not exist outside embodiment, we cannot run away from our lived in

¹⁶⁴ *op.cit.*, p.113.

¹⁶⁵ This is the creative relationship of the maternal that Miller-McLemore addresses in her essay, Miller-McLemore in Bunge, *op.cit.*, p.453; also see, Ettinger in Pollock, *ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ Hay and Nye, *op.cit.*, pp.9-10.

¹⁶⁷ *op.cit.*, p.21.

¹⁶⁸ Nelson, 1992, *ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ Ronald Morris, 'Linking Sexuality and Spirituality in Childhood: Beyond Body-Spirit Dualism and Towards an Education of the Inspired Sensual Body', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, Volume 6, no. 2, 2001, pp. 159-175. [Accessed on 10th February 2002].

flesh as has been suggested by the Church Fathers to attain a higher spiritual plain, to do so is an illusion.¹⁷⁰

This link between spirituality and sexuality within the arena of education excited me and I considered this to be radical thinking with regard to the child because of my own research into the female child's incarnational value. In his paper Ronald Morris noted that

the difficulty of associating the terms sexuality and spirituality together, as if the combination was sacrilegious. The association is even more difficult when we add the word children. Children are synonymous with purity and innocence. Sexuality, however, is often associated with the complete opposite – guilt, danger and sin.¹⁷¹

Morris found it very perplexing when he began his research to find anyone who had written on this subject and even when he broached the subject with work colleagues, the response was mainly unfruitful. He unfolds his argument with justifying this combination of the sexual and spiritual in children by also talking about sensuality, which is that we are all sensual beings and respond to touch, relationship and our environment as an embodied experience. Morris critiques the dualism of history¹⁷² which he argues gives us its legacy of disembodied human beingness today. Even though we have begun to talk more and more about the importance of connecting mind/spirit and body this still remains an issue.¹⁷³ Mary Grey suggests that what we consider embodiment and our engagement with the progressive age of 'various technologies, cyber space; commodification of spirituality the body and sex'¹⁷⁴ is not a fluid healthy reality. Morris adds to this by saying that 'the way we rely on travelling in our cars for short distances and physical exercise at the gym are just an entrapment into a mechanistic way of living'.¹⁷⁵ He suggests that by 'engaging with our environment, the elements, to feel the weather on our skin including the rain, the wind as well as the warmth of the sun. This can be a way of getting back in touch with our internal world, a way of getting back into our bodies. Touch and massage as suggested by his research are beneficial to a wide range of people with various conditions, this applies especially to young children, he reminds us, it is in this engagement that they first learn, can be nurtured and develop their already sensual selves in relationship to the other; this is also the sexual and spiritual selves. 'Massage is good way of engaging both parents and grandparents and can benefit everyone in a transformative way.'¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁰ *op.cit.*, p.168.

¹⁷¹ *op.cit.*, p.171.

¹⁷² Morris, *op.cit.*, pp. 162-3.

¹⁷³ *op.cit.*, p.162.

¹⁷⁴ Mary Grey 'The disenchantment and re-enchantment of childhood in an age of globalization', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 11:1, 2006, pp.11-21. [Accessed on 24th July 2008].

¹⁷⁵ Morris, *op.cit.*, p.167.

¹⁷⁶ *op.cit.*, p.171

Other educational writers within this research project look at creative channels like art,¹⁷⁷ music¹⁷⁸ and dance¹⁷⁹ as ways to observe the relational consciousness of the child and her/his ability to integrate her/his spiritual life in the everyday occurrence of life and well-being. These creative channels are a huge resource for well-being and awakening to new consciousness in all of us and I would agree that childhood is a place for strengthening something that is already innate as Heyward's *dunamis* intimates regarding human/divine incarnation. (I will address this further in section three). Morris advocates that 'the paths to a richer integration of body and spirit can be explored in the classroom from elementary school to the university...re-integration of body and spirit, of sexuality and spirituality, begins with re-education of the sensual body.'¹⁸⁰ One of the approaches he takes is to challenge the preoccupation of what we think beauty is, by using disablement in its many forms as another way of seeing beauty within the internal world of some of the people who live from this embodied experience. Within this paper we embark on such truths as tenderness¹⁸¹ and relationality that are born from this healthy integration where we can enjoy the pleasure of our sensual, inspired embodied lives and in turn truly respect one another, the rest of creation and the world in which we live. He draws a parallel between the two and says that to deny this integration leads to disembodiment and opens a doorway to violence and destructive behaviour.¹⁸² Morris says that the yearning for the spiritual will never be adequately satisfied as long as we fail to nourish or educate the inspired sensual body¹⁸³ and I would add to this that we have to begin with the gendered child.

The sexual/ spiritual connection has been addressed by others who are interested in the spiritual lives of children. John Wilson advocates that this intimate connection is vital within an educative praxis. He says that rather than ignoring our embodiment we need to embrace it and shake of the dualisms that have been created around it especially regarding children within sex education. Wilson proposes that 'in sex education the role of the teacher is precisely to share forms of living life with children, in order to prepare them for close

¹⁷⁷ Ruth Roberts, 'Arts activities for children and young people in need, helping children to develop mindfulness, spiritual awareness and self-esteem', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 16:2, 2011, pp.191-192. [Accessed on 12th September 2012].

¹⁷⁸ Ruth Wills 'The magic of music: a study into the promotion of children's well-being through singing', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 16:1, 2011, pp.37-46. [Accessed on 12th September 2012].

¹⁷⁹ Jeanne Broadbent 'Research paper', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 9:1, 2004, pp.97-104. [Accessed on 20th June 2006].

¹⁸⁰ *op.cit.*, p.169.

¹⁸¹ *op.cit.*, p.168.

¹⁸² *op.cit.*, p.172.

¹⁸³ *op.cit.*, p.163.

relationships in adulthood and give them some understanding of love and the emotions'.¹⁸⁴ J. Mark Halstead and Susan Waite noted that

Other observations showed first, that children's attitude toward sex manifested in slang, graffiti and using swear words to describe body parts and sexual acts. They suggested that this was a learned response from how they were informed about sex e.g. the media, TV and they thought it was also due to parents and teachers alike being either embarrassed by the sex question, not wanting to answer or engage with the children at this level because of their own prudish attitude or thinking that the children were not ready yet for such conversations about sexuality and didn't see the connection with spirituality.¹⁸⁵

This highlights the importance of sexual nurture within sex education and by this observation informs us of the complexity of the child in relationship values. Their second observation was in relation to gender difference between boys and girls, where it was noted that boys rarely engaged at the same level as girls who were far more sensitive, relational and connected which was perceived by Halstead and Waite to be 'spiritual'.¹⁸⁶ This observation again was viewed within the limited model of heteronormativity. Mark Chater¹⁸⁷ addresses these issues around the complexity of sexual orientation in relation to issues around the containment of heteronormativity¹⁸⁸ which are still greatly ignored within the confines of school and public political life even though legislation has been passed for equality of all.

Acknowledging the spiritual life of the child then is important but only if it is able to transcend and transform the child's future in an embodied way. Nye fully recognises the child's spiritual potential and the three main focus of her writing from a Christian perspective are: 'First, childhood as a natural source of spirituality. Second, looking at ways to help children value and express their spirituality and third, discerning the role of Christian nurture and worship in early spiritual development.'¹⁸⁹ From my own Christian perspective I agree if this is to be incarnational and transformative. Is there a space for transformation of children's lives within the Church environment with its declining numbers and exclusive teaching?

What is the value of situating the child's developing moral and spiritual life through Biblical reading and reflection. Christian educator and priest Howard Worsley advocates

¹⁸⁴ John Wilson, 'The Spiritual and the Earthly', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 6:2, 2001, pp.147-157. [Accessed on 10th February 2002].

¹⁸⁵ J. Mark Halstead & Susan Waite 'Nurturing the Spiritual in Children's Sexual Development', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 6:2, 2001, pp.185-206. [Accessed on 10th February 2002].

¹⁸⁶ *op.cit.*, p.186.

¹⁸⁷ Mark Chater 'Another Country: An exploration of the subversive in sexuality and spirituality', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 6:2, 2001, pp.177-184. [Accessed on 10th February 2002].

¹⁸⁸ DePalma and Atkinson, 2009, *ibid.* also, DePalma and Atkinson, 2008, *ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ Nye, *op.cit.*, p.xi.

reading Biblical texts as a way to involve children in storytelling and exploring their spiritual lives by releasing their authentic voice, which he argues will in turn develop their faith and moral lives. The motivation for this project was the argument made by influential researcher Robert Goldman¹⁹⁰ in the 1960's, who said that 'Bible texts should not be used with children under the age of 12 because their cognitive reasoning was inadequate'.¹⁹¹ Worsley believes that children under twelve can understand the Biblical texts and will have something to offer back from them through their own reinterpretation. Worsley says that The Bible Reading Project needed to involve parents or other family members reading on a regular basis (daily) to the children, with the adults feeding their own experiences as well as the child's response to the reading, back to the project. Worsley methodology involved the splitting of particular texts which he thinks will encourage engagement into different genres taken from both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. The genres are named accordingly:

- 1) **Texts of wonder** (a) The Creation (Genesis 1 – 2 v3) (b) Moses and the burning bush (Exodus 3 v1 – 4 v5) (c) The birth of Jesus (Luke 1 v26 – 55 & 2 v1 – 35)
- (2) **Texts of adventure and leadership** (a) David and the mighty men (Samuel 23 v13 – 17) (b) The fall of Jericho (Joshua 2 v1 – 24 & 6 v1 – 27) (c) Paul's shipwreck (Acts 27)
- (3) **Texts of terror** (a) Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 22 v1 – 19) (b) Jephthah's return (Judges 11 v29 – 40)
- (c) Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5 v1 – 11)
- (4) **Texts of justice and judgement** (a) Banishment from Eden (Genesis 3)
- (b) Noah's Ark (Genesis 6 – 9 v19) (c) The sheep and the goats (Matthew 25 v31 – 46)
- (5) **Texts of comfort and hope** (a) David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17 v1 – 54)
- (b) The resurrection of Jesus (John 19 v13 – 20 v25) (c) The new Jerusalem (Revelation 20 v11 – 22 v21)
- (6) **Texts of comedy** (a) Balaam's ass (Numbers 22 v21 – 35) (b) The unjust judge (Luke 18 v1 – 8) (c) The seven husbands in heaven (Luke 20 v27 – 40)
- (7) **Texts of mercy and forgiveness**
- (a) Jonah (Jonah 1 & 3 – 4) (b) The prodigal son (Luke 15 v11 – 32)
- (c) Zacchaeus (Luke 19 v1 – 10)¹⁹²

A table was then made to record the outcomes of the project. There were mixed responses but one of the parents could not help but show her disappointment.

An example of this is the mother who told the story of the fall of Jericho, hoping that her daughter would relive the event that she experienced as a child, by marching and banging drums and enjoying the triumph of the walls

¹⁹⁰ R. Goldman, *Readiness for Religion* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. 1965).

¹⁹¹ Howard Worsley 'The Bible in the family context', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 15:2, 2010, pp.115-127. [Accessed on 6th June 2012].

¹⁹² *op.cit.*, p.120.

tumbling down. When her daughter responded reflectively and critically, questioning why so many people had to die, her mother felt saddened.¹⁹³

This in my view was quite telling and hermeneutically challenging.

In the 2007 at the American Academy of Religion (AAR) I attended two papers that were presented to a panel at the Conference, both papers were on the texts of terror. Russell W. Dalton argued that 'Children's Bible stories were one of the most influential types of publication in the United States'¹⁹⁴ His concern was whether the Bible was age appropriate relying also on Robert Goldman's research of the 1960's, in terms of hearing sexual violent stories about other children. He said that American Churches assume that these insightful stories may be helpful to children's religious education. Daltons concerns were for the violent content which he takes from a feminist reading of Phyllis Trible's *Texts of Terror*¹⁹⁵, that have led towards an interpretation of being sanctioned by God and has helped create a cultural legacy making child abuse acceptable on many levels'.¹⁹⁶ The story of Isaac and Abraham is one such story as suggested by Alice Miller is one of the main stories that has helped create this legacy. Dalton said that the following Bibles authors softened the story with 'I is for ISAAC like Jesus he lies, stretched out on the wood'¹⁹⁷ as a way of learning the alphabet. Another author wrote 'He did not resist he was gentle as a lamb that was led to slaughter'.¹⁹⁸ Whilst others referenced here, heightened it with the story from Elisha and The She Bears in (2 Kings 2:23-24) who mauled forty two boys who had turned away from God'.¹⁹⁹ In the Bible story book there are warnings of judgement and punishment on the side of the children.²⁰⁰ The story of Jephthah's daughter is the story of an obedient child who is intent on wanting to do God's will, we are told that 'Her example is well deserving of imitation by the young'.²⁰¹ Dalton presents a number of texts and a long bibliography of Bible story books which contain these text most of which circulate prominently even today. He says telling 'children they should respect their elders and watch their tongue, or be in danger of fearful consequences from a

¹⁹³ *op.cit.*, p.123.

¹⁹⁴ Russell W, Dalton, 'Children's Bible Texts of Terror: Abraham and Isaac, Jephthas Daughter and Elisha and the She-Bears in U.S. Children's Bible', *American Academy of Religion AAR*, 2007, pp.1-14.

¹⁹⁵ Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (London, SCM Press, 2002).

¹⁹⁶ Alice Miller *Though Shalt Not Be Aware* (London: Pluto Press, 1985).also by Miler, *The Untouched Key: Tracing Childhood Trauma in Creativity and Destructiveness* (New York: Anchor Publishing, 1990). pp.137-145.

¹⁹⁷ Margaret Sangster, *The Story Bible* (New York: Moffat Yard and Company, 1905), p.70.

¹⁹⁸ Isabella Child, *The Child's Picture Bible* (Boston: G.W. Cottrell Publisher, 1853), p.21.

¹⁹⁹ Arthur Maxwell, *The Bible Story Volume Five Nashville* (Tennessee: The Southern Publishing Association, 1955), p.90. God Stopped their wicked breath and sent two raging bears that tore them from limb to limb to death, with blood and groans and tears'. Charles Walter Brown *Young Folks Bible Stories* (Chicago: MA Donahue & Co., 1920). p.13.

²⁰⁰ Dalton, *op.cit.*, p.8.

²⁰¹ John Howard *Scripture History for the Young* (New York: Virtue Yorston Co., Publishers 1863), p.132

God who could get you at any time',²⁰² is an accepted norm. Should these texts really have that sort of authority and do people really believe the telling of them would lead to spiritual formation of the young whilst including such cruelty and death as part of God's plan? How could you be convinced that following these examples would truly make the child an acceptable follower of God? This is the kind of spirituality and belief that Heyward and other feminist liberation theologians warn us against.

The second paper by Annemie Dillen²⁰³ addresses this question by looking at the texts about children to see what the ethical and moral values of them are in the context of today and how Christianity uses them. She looks at some of the positive and negative texts with a view to what stories should we tell children and how these particular texts are used to legitimise our treatment of them. For example it has been acknowledged that some Christian parents have used the authority of the text to punish their children by using physical punishment and spanking them but also to show them boundaries within the context of parent child relationships in terms of obedience. We see this with Dillen's reference to household codes in Ephesians 6:1-4 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour your father and mother – which is the first commandment with a promise.'²⁰⁴ She also says that these household codes come from a broader frame which incorporate hierarchical structures of obedience of the one below to the one above focussing on 'the relationships between men and women, parents (fathers) and children (sons), and masters and slaves'²⁰⁵ Her hermeneutical exploration is complex for those who do not have a clear exegesis²⁰⁶ of historical context or the texts themselves within the context they were written, all of which is important. So to take random pieces from the text themselves whether from the New Testament or the Hebrew Bible and to act on them accordingly is misleading and dangerous as we have already seen throughout this section. However I resolutely think that certain stories have been used to control women and will continue to do so unless we stop depending on them. The story of Eve is still surprisingly one of the first stories told in the children's bible²⁰⁷

²⁰² Dalton, *op.cit.*, p.14.

²⁰³ Annemie Dillen, 'Good News for Children? Towards a Biblical Hermeneutic of Texts of Terror' *Unpublished Lecture Notes AAR*, 2007.

²⁰⁴ *op.cit.*, p.2.

²⁰⁵ *ibid.*

²⁰⁶ *op.cit.*, pp.1-13.

²⁰⁷ See Children's Bibles – Holy Bible: *New International Version: Children's Edition* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, 2009), Genesis 2: v 23. Genesis 3: v 1-16 p.5. NIV *A Whole new World of Discovery: The Adventure Bible: A Children's Study Bible* (London, Sydney, Auckland: Hodder and Stoughton, 2010), Genesis 2: v. 23 Genesis 3: 1-16. p.4, *The Usborne Children's Bible* (London: Usborne Publishing Limited, 2009). Genesis: Adam and Eve "God didn't want Adam to be lonely so he made a woman. He called her Eve" p.7 "Eve gave it to me" said Adam. p.11, Even in this story the subjugation of the female is told that she is blameworthy for her disobedient act of eating from the tree of knowledge. The illustrations and colour are persuasive of the goodness of this story but the underlying message of inequality remains true.

after the creation myth, and subliminally, if not consciously, permeates the psyches of our children clearly showing the positions of men and women in God's creation.

Pamela Caudill Ovwigho and Arnold Cole in their research relied on Bible teaching for predicting moral behaviour in children and adolescents. They argue that the Bible had played a crucial role in helping children's development through to adolescence and adulthood and helped them to resist the temptations of the world. They said that children who were Christian showed their spirituality through prayer or reading the Bible. The conclusion to their research project was that

Although church attendance was found to be a stronger predictor of behaviours such as smoking and drinking that fall under parental control, it is important to consider what could happen in these areas when children enter young adulthood. Our previous studies with teens suggest that Bible engagement emerges at this stage as the best spiritual predictor of behaviour.²⁰⁸

It is without doubt that this needs to be argued against because apart from its disembodied polarised approach it is not helpful or engaging in relation to the embodied spiritual lives of children. This approach is alienating, excluding and just adds to the ever widening void of intergenerational relationships.

Gender issues have been tentatively approached within these papers Tony Eade's paper on gender difference in spiritual development starts with asking the question about whether gender plays a part in spiritual development, he says that 'most teachers' immediate response, at least on first consideration, was that gender has nothing to do with spiritual development.'²⁰⁹ The critical points for me are around how he outlines the methodological problems regarding gender issues surrounding spiritual development. Eade makes four points; 'one that gender definitions are elusive, two that broaching the subject evokes strong entrenched responses, three, gender is a big research area but none of it relates to spiritual development and four, gender research is limited to adults'.²¹⁰ He also adds to this that 'the social and cultural forces in how gender identity is constructed make it debatable how much parents, teachers or other adults can do anything about it'.²¹¹ I would want to argue first, that gender issues are only as elusive as society allows, meaning that it does not look deeply enough at difference and mostly decides not to. Second, that if broaching the subject of

²⁰⁸ Pamela Caudill Ovwigho & Arnold Cole 'Scriptural engagement, communication with God, and moral behavior among children', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 15:2, 2010, pp.101-113. [Accessed on 6th June 2012].

²⁰⁹ Tony Eade 'Do young boys and girls have distinct and different approaches and needs in relation to spiritual development?', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 9:1, 2004, pp.53-66. [Accessed on 20th June 2006].

²¹⁰ *op.cit.*, p.54.

²¹¹ *op.cit.*, p.55.

gender challenges the status quo then there is all the more need to address the subject. Third, there are huge discourses discussed around gender, spirituality and sexuality within feminist liberation theology due to historical gender inequality and dualism within the heteronormative-patriarchal-matrix and four, gender analysis is greatly needed and has already begun to be addressed in children by some educationalists.²¹²

Robert Coles whose research spans at least four decades demonstrates through a series of interviews investigating how each child experiences the environment of their religious worlds and non-organised religious worlds. The stories told by children about their religious beliefs found in Coles' book hold truths within different religious faith contexts that engage with the child's spiritual experience. His contribution holds considerable value, showing the hidden depth of each child within their own cultural context and experience.²¹³ Not only has he shown what children think and say, he also gets the children to illustrate from their different faiths showing how they imagined God to look like or how they experienced their spiritual lives in relation to their everyday experience of school and home life, through art.

I am interested in how children reflect their own creative process through art and written reflections, because they can tell the observer much about the child's perspective and the environment that has informed them. The images and comments shown above and below are but a few selected amongst the many others that have been collected by Coles in his research project in Chapter 7, 'Young Spirituality: Visionary Moments'.²¹⁴ These images and comments demonstrate the open vivid imagination of the child that are interplayed with what these children are taught by their parents, teachers and clergy about religion and God.

Whilst I think it is important that we care for the spiritual life of the child it is equally important how mindful we are in how we nurture those lives. I agree with Heyward and Isherwood that spirituality is innate and so is already present in the embodied life of the child as she is already incarnate. However we are taught from childhood within Christianity that the spiritual life is called only from the outside to come in as we can see in the first picture below in Figure 18, where a child has drawn herself 'praying'.²¹⁵ Figure 19 shows the dualistic Christian teaching of a polarised view of humanities destiny depending on how good or evil human beings are, to where they may end up when they die. Figure 20 shows another dualistic view this time within religious and non-religious people.²¹⁶ I cannot help but note in

²¹²See Glenda MacNaughton *Rethinking Gender in Early Childhood Education* (London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd., 2000); Epstein, *Schooling Sexualities*; DePalma, and Atkinson, (eds.), *Interrogating Heteronormativity In Primary Schools*; DePalma and Atkinson, (eds.), *Invisible Boundaries*.

²¹³ Coles *op.cit.*, pp.169-201.

²¹⁴ *ibid.*, pp.148-166.

²¹⁵ *op.cit.*, p.170.

²¹⁶ *op.cit.*, p.172.

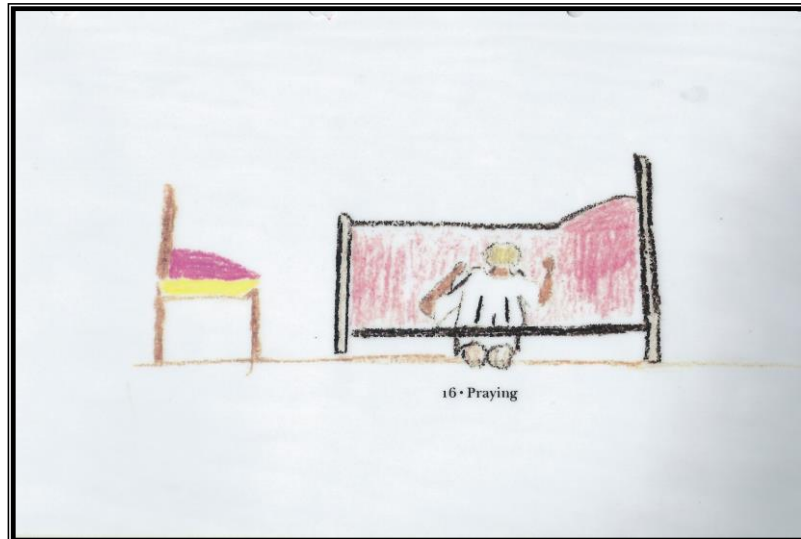


Figure 18 'Plate 16. Praying'

Robert Coles



Figure 19 'Plate 1. Heaven and Hell'

Robert Coles

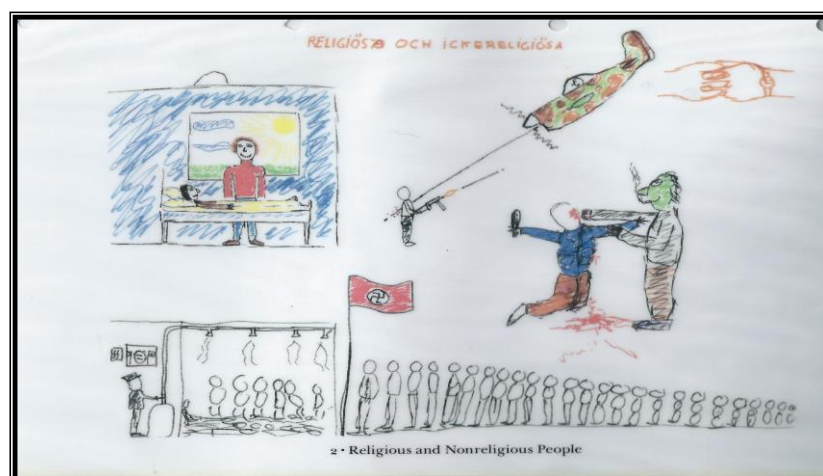


Figure 20 'Plate 2. Religious and Nonreligious People'

Robert Coles

this image that there are blurred boundaries there is no clear definition with the violent nature between the idea of good and bad.

When something bad happens, you must accept it is a message from God. He doesn't want to hurt us, but he has to punish us sometimes. We can't just have our own way! If you can't follow him and accept him as your master, then you won't be visiting him in heaven! My father tells me every day - every other day maybe! - that no spoilt children go to heaven...²¹⁷

The idea of God as a person is also another way the divine is projected onto the child's imaginative process as the pictures and the three commentaries demonstrate.

I don't think of God except for His face; I mean, when I picture His face.

When God came here He looked like a man, He was Jesus but then He went back to being God. I don't know what he looks like now there has to be a face.

The Lord is everyone's, so He is not white and He is not brown black. He is all the skin colours and the eye colour; it is hard to imagine him that is why I will just use pencil.....Probably He has all the colours of the hair just like with the eyes.²¹⁸

One of the stories told in Cole's book demonstrates the fine balance between the vulnerability and the resilience of the child. Martha's story relates an embodied effect of Church experience,

her fearfulness when older men and women (among them her uncle and her grandmother) seemed on the verge of losing control as they shouted warnings, appeals, lamentations, denunciations. She tried not to hear...much to her alarm they worked their way into her dreams. She woke up in a cold sweat, her legs 'shaking', her head hurting and her stomach in pain. "After one (dream) I thought I was dying...I was scared for a little while, but all of a sudden I stopped being scared and remembered God"²¹⁹

Martha's image of God had gnashing teeth and looked very angry which she added the words to 'watch out He'll spot you' reflecting back the experience of her uncles 'admonishing participation in the local evangelical Church'.²²⁰ This shows how porous children are and how they have to negotiate so much more than adults realise when they engage them in their beliefs and how we might just as easily traumatise them as well as aid them in their spiritual development.

Robert Lenkiewicz (1942-2002) is a contemporary artist and philosopher who held an interesting view on children's spirituality. His projects and exhibitions were based on social

²¹⁷ *op.cit.*, p.175.

²¹⁸ *op.cit.*, pp.40-68.

²¹⁹ *op.cit.*, p.48.

²²⁰ *op.cit.*, p.47.

enquiry and human behaviour.²²¹ I mention him because I met him in 1986 and took part in his education project. I found being part of this project also opened me to the deeper nature of his enquiry within which impacted on me in a thought provoking way. This not only added to that spark of passion within me but also linked me to my own educational experience and my life experience outside formal education. In 1988 my own art had just begun its embryonic journey at this time in terms of journal writing and recording my feelings through image which Lenkiewicz further encouraged in me. This experience also confirmed my own observations that I was beginning to have in relation to what was going on in the immediate world around me.



Figure 21 'The Box' artist Bianca Cambriello and poet Mark Pearce.

²²¹ See Francis Mallet, *Robert Lenkiewicz: Paintings and Projects* (Plymouth, Devon: White Lane Press, 2006).

Lenkiewicz's project Seventeen was on Observations in Local Education exhibited in 1988²²² which included one hundred and fifty paintings and two large tomes filled with supporting texts from each sitter who sat for the paintings. Lenkiewicz said that this project was the most depressing project that he had worked on²²³ because of what he had observed, heard and felt whilst painting his subjects. He said

Education, as we experience it in 'civilised' societies, is primarily concerned with the linking of human behaviour to commercial enterprise ... the conscription character of schooling, the effects of isolation amongst large numbers of other people, examinations, and destructive forms of competition, are patterns of control. Sensuality, energy and amoral curiosity frighten the adult, and the adult will fear the child...The young person's sensitivity to example is immeasurable. A parent or mentor whose creative life is passionless, dulled and uninspired, will have great difficulty in valuing themselves... We do not value another person by feeling superior or inferior to them. That is the straight road to fascism. That we may mean the young harm is a very unattractive thought, but refutation is tenuous when we observe our schooling procedures.²²⁴

During his research he was presented with the poem shown below that was written by a seven year old pupil Mark Pearce from Ivybridge Primary School in Devon which is illustrated in the picture above that was painted by ten year old Bianca Cambriello. Lenkiewicz was touched by this wisp of wisdom that arose from a child's creative imagination, a moment that held the possibility to think differently. Yet when the poem was presented to the classroom teacher it was ignored, it was the classroom assistant who praised, encouraged the child by nurturing the idea and brought that hope to life and to the attention of Lenkiewicz. The teacher's rejection displayed the facet of fanaticism Lenkiewicz thought was present within the legislation that powerfully dictated how our children should be educated. He thought that the lack of creative input and encouragement within educative practice, a legacy that was left by Thatcherism in the eighties, failed to nurture our children's imagination so it was in this way that education led to the lack of creative inspired lives that could be taken into adulthood and passed on to the children of the generations that follow. Lenkiewicz presented these two volumes of observations written he said 'by the sitters along with the drab that British schooling in the eighties was about the mass spiritual slaughter of the young on a huge scale'.²²⁵

Although the following poem below and art above were created by secularised children an ethical spiritual quality of justice and relationality is held within the vision of the

²²² <http://www.robertlenkiewicz.org/project-17-observations-local-education>. [Accessed on 20th August 2007].

²²³ *ibid.*

²²⁴ *ibid.*

²²⁵ <http://www.flicker.com/photos/robertlenkiewicz> [Accessed July 17th 2012]

creators themselves. This supports what Hay and Nye say about the recognition of the spirit of the child outside of formal religion. It also holds the possibilities of co-creation that Heyward speaks about. The difference I think between the images and comments that are presented in Cole's book are regurgitations of culture and adult dualistic teaching in religion. Lenkiewicz, however presents us with the picture of a child who seems to be aware of the troubles of the world, but seemingly free of those dualistic constraints and has the creative ability to build something new, fresh and with hope. The young poet writes

I will put in my box Hope
that will ruin all battles,
I will put in my box musical
peace that will begin
friendships.
I will put in my box, a birds
Chorus that will wake no evil
My box is made of sweet
dreams that will make love.

I will love my box. That
will make it powerfull²²⁶ so it
can be trusted.²²⁷

Education then surely is a mixed bag of experience that both children and teachers bring to the communal table of learning and being taught, if only we have eyes to see and ears to hear how to nurture the child's spirituality. Since Coles book and the Lenkiewicz project there has been a turning point as we have seen with theologians, educators and government legislation all of whom are asking questions about the spiritual life of the child.

I think we can see that Christianity has had fixed ideas in relation to gender inequality, treatment of children and slavery which have often given rise to traumatic events for these groups. I feel it would be remiss not to mention something of the effect this may have on the spiritual lives of children.

Trauma and the Spiritual Child

Judith Herman reminds us that history is full of episodic amnesia in the light of traumatic events. She says that 'Periods of active investigation have alternated with periods of oblivion.'²²⁸ We can see the episodes of change regarding the life of the child on both the historical and personal level but we have never delved deeply enough into the roots of the causes of those changes. She says

²²⁶ This spelling of powerful is the spelling of poet Marl Pearce.

²²⁷ Both the poem and image were taken from the Plymouth Evening Herald on Saturday 1st January 1994.

²²⁸ Judith Herman, M.D., *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence-from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), p.7.

To study psychological trauma is to come face to face with both with human vulnerability in the natural world and the capacity for evil in human nature. To study trauma means bearing witness to horrible events. When the events are natural disasters or “acts of God”, those who bear witness sympathise readily with the victim. But when the events are of human design, those who bear witness are caught in the conflict between victim and perpetrator.²²⁹

This covers every area concerning trauma; children are always the descendants so whatever happens in the adult world is witnessed by them, both through sight and feeling and passed on to their descendants, a bit like pass the parcel. One example is the rape of women always being a factor of war which children witness and are mostly victims of. This is trauma and I would argue that it is also a spiritual assault. ‘When the victim is already devalued (a woman, a child), she may find that the most dramatic events of her life take place outside the realm of social validated reality. Her experience becomes unspeakable’.²³⁰ We cannot think about these single events being separate affecting single individual lives without having a knock on effect. History is full of traumatic events that are interconnected because of the witness, the victim and the event.

Christianity has without doubt a bloody and traumatic history²³¹ which begins with the violent death of its founder and leader Jesus by crucifixion.²³² Coupled with the history of childhood that preceded the birth of Christianity I think trauma and its effects hold a place here for discussion. Trauma which is something that violates the autonomy of the person at the level of basic bodily integrity can lead to loss of control of bodily functions which in turn can be part of the traumatic memory. Trauma does not always occur from something as violent as rape in war it can be any act experienced by the person that destroys self-worth and autonomy. Trauma does not just disappear it goes underground and travels from generation to generation unless it is understood and recognised for what it is as part of the healing process. The spiritual lives of many have been affected by unacknowledged trauma. Research within certain therapeutic practices looks at the way bodies hold traumatic experiences from childhood and have shown that body trauma is an accepted phenomenon caused by shock which is sometimes understated in childhood.²³³

²²⁹ *op.cit.*, p.8.

²³⁰ *ibid.*

²³¹ See for example, Susan A., Griffin, *Chorus of Stones: The Private Life of War* (London: The Women’s Press Ltd 1994), Rosemary Radford Ruether *America, Amerikkka, Elect Nation and Imperial Violence* (London: Equinox, 2007); Nicole Soletto, ‘The Hidden Wars: Violence Against Women and Just War Theory’ in Isherwood and Ruether 2007, *op.cit.*, Ch.6. pp.90-111.

²³² See Shelley Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), and Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

²³³ Peter Levine and Ian Marshall, ‘Breath and Consciousness: Reconsidering the Viability of Breathwork in Psychological and Spiritual Interventions in Human Development’ in Ian Macnaughton, *Body Breath*

We could argue as research seems to point to it that this trauma can be generational coming down to us through history. Things get passed on in many ways through storytelling, but also through the cellular memories within bodies, through habits of learned behavioural patterns and through dichotomies that have separated humans from their natural environment both internally and externally. It is interesting to see how these patterns have evolved over time and space within the heteropatriarchal matrix.

I think this deserves some serious thought in relation to how the bodies of children were viewed and treated. Soma is the Greek word for the living body, somatics looks at the body as a whole living thinking organism. In this we are reminded of how the body absorbs and is affected by life experiences, so it is affected at a deep level by our environment and all that happens within it, all of our life experiences have an effect on our quality of life. Whatever our experiences are we take them deep into our bodies and deep within our cellular system and this affects the way we develop and how we are in relationship with one another at a cellular level. Somatic psychology uses movement to release the somatised cellular memories which actually become trapped within our muscles and other soft tissues as well as at a deep bone level. Movement enables reintegration of experience back into the body and helps restore the damaged and lost developmental processes. It does this by releasing trapped energy that has become locked at a cellular level in the muscles of our bodies through trauma that is sometimes so subtle and at other times shocking. We all fit onto a broad spectrum of these experiences and in varying degrees.²³⁴

Adult attitudes also become locked into behavioural patterns which can be seen if we are conscious and catch ourselves using phrases and actions which can have a detrimental effect on the child's life. If we think about this on a somatic level we can perhaps begin to think about what the traumatic effect within the violence of Christian history alone, has had on the generations of children. Dualism within this theological domain of history has undoubtedly affected gendered lives, particularly those of women and children yet we do not fully acknowledge this at the somatic level that I am talking about. It is at this level I think that this has disrupted relational possibilities between the sexes and gender of humanity, causing a noticeable gendered inequality; therefore creating unnecessary tensions that are difficult to live within. Tensions that would trigger embodied trauma within an entangled historical context. This trauma may go deep because Christianity has encouraged us not to live in our bodies for fear of sin. However if we did we would be aware both of the trauma and the

and Consciousness: A Somatics Anthology (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 2004), pp.367-394.

²³⁴See Linda Hartley *The Wisdom of the Body Moving: An Introduction To Body Mind Centring* (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 1995); Linda Hartley, *Somatic Psychology: Body, Mind and Meaning* (London and Philadelphia: Whurr Publishers Ltd, 2004).

bodies potential for healing and holding us safe enough and embedded healthily in the world in which we live.

Somatic psychology as a relatively recent development looks at the healing of the body and mind's dualistic rupture which has been viewed as damaging us and setting us up to damage others and the world in which we live. Wilhelm Reich's research into energy fields and their function has been a primary influence to work in body work, movement and somatics through psychoanalysis, 'because of his attention to the expressive language of the body. His understanding of 'defensive armour,' i.e., repressed emotion that gets stored in the body as chronic muscular tension, and his belief in the value of cathartic release has been essential to the work of many dance therapists'.²³⁵ Reich was a follower of Freud but went beyond what Freud's psychological theory of neurological impulses were and thought of the body as a whole thinking organism. His discoveries of energetic fields that he found were innate in all living organisms on the planet and beyond into the surrounding universe, greatly influenced the foundational therapeutic practice of somatic psychology. Opening the door to the mystery of our beginnings, he called this newly discovered phenomenon 'Orgone energy'.²³⁶ This has fed into the discipline of somatic psychology which is used within the teaching of dance performance.

Somatic psychology is important in the recovery process that reconnects body and mind, helping to heal the rupture that it has created and so deals with the whole person on every level of being, including that of the spiritual. It also looks at how the body responds and resonates with its environment. Somatic psychology through its varied therapeutic practices and the education of them²³⁷ can help highlight the effects of traumatic experiences within the early developmental process in childhood. Somatic psychologist Linda Hartley discusses how trauma affects the body deeply on a cellular level. She says our bodies retain these experiences in the cellular memory²³⁸ through touch, thought, and voice, every sound and most events that occur in the body's environment.²³⁹ These are taken in through the living tissue of the body and the energy of which can then become somatised, which means they become locked and blocked in our muscles, organs and even right down to our bones. Our bodies do this because they are very good at protecting themselves from any experience that

²³⁵ Joan Chodorow *Dance Therapy & Depth Psychology: The Moving Imagination* (London, New York: Routledge, 1991), p.33 .

²³⁶ *ibid.*

²³⁷ See <http://www.bellevuemassagetherapy.com/somatic-education.html> for somatic practices e.g. Alexandra Technique, Body-Mind Centring, Continuum Movement, Eutony, Feldenkrais Method, Yoga, Hanna Somatic Education, Kinetic Awareness, Sensory Awareness and Trager Approach etc [Accessed 11th march 2011].

²³⁸ Hartley, 1995, *ibid.*

²³⁹ This is about body resonance and how our bodies resonate with our environment.

is too much for them to bear in the moment of that experience so that they forget to undo themselves and dissipate the energy within the natural process. Peter A. Levine and Maggie Kline talk about trauma as a physiological event as opposed to psychological.

Because there is no time to think when facing threat, our primary responses are instinctual. In other words we were born with them. At the root of a traumatic reaction is the 280 million-year-old heritage that we share with nearly every living creature on earth...a heritage that resides in the most primitive parts of the brain, known as the reptilian brain. When the reptilian brain perceives danger, it automatically activates an extraordinary amount of energy...This in turn triggers a pounding heart and numerous other bodily changes, designed to give our bodies every advantage it needs to defend itself...²⁴⁰

So to avoid being traumatised we need to allow the process of that energetic excess to discharge itself completely. If a child hurts itself or feels threatened an adult can help this process through empathy and compassion for the other and in this case the child. If the energy is not discharged it becomes trapped and symptomatic. Levine and Kline say that

The younger the child the fewer resources she has to defend and protect herself, resulting in a greater amount of undischarged energy. The likelihood of the onset of future traumatic reactions is directly proportional to the amount of mobilized energy that was ready to fight, flee, or protect, but had no place to go.²⁴¹

This ends up creating a splitting of parts, between the psychological and physiological elements of the body, if the trauma is not recognised then it can become compounded and compacted by further experiences of misunderstanding of the situation through the lack of an empathetic engagement and remains in the body. With regard to the child in its developmental process Hartley informs us that,

the young infant lives and learns through its bodily existence, body and mind not yet separated. But in the process of development, out of essential unity of psyche and soma the infant begins to differentiate body sensation, emotion and thought. This is a natural necessary process, but if it becomes extreme we *in this instant the infant* (italics mine) experience the unnatural splitting of those experiences from each other²⁴²

Somatic psychology helps through movement recovery and healing of the rupture caused by the trauma, by releasing that energy through various somatic movement practices like the Alexander Technique, Rolfing²⁴³ and for adults who are dealing with childhood trauma

²⁴⁰ Peter A. Levine and Maggie Kline, 'Guiding Your Child Through Trauma...It Won't Hurt Forever' in Macnaughton, *op.cit.* p.310.

²⁴¹ *ibid.*

²⁴² Hartley, 2004, *op.cit.* p.5.

²⁴³ <http://www.bellevuemassagetherapy.com/somatic-education.html> Somatic Practices.

authentic movement.²⁴⁴ When I refer to authentic, I am talking about personal movement that works for the particular uniqueness of that particular body; there are other techniques which are open to body diversity. Different bodies have different ways of moving that enable recovery and release of energy which is trapped and so grounds and centres the body toward a new way of being, thus offering opportunity for transformation. It is also important to note that touch plays an important role in these techniques however touch has become such a taboo at least within British society. Yet touch plays such an important part in healing and from a Christian perspective and Jesus' ministry included touch bodily fluids²⁴⁵ for example healing the lame dis-eased and the blind, is an incarnational act. Children are also so naturally tactile in their being which I suggest encompasses the spiritual, because of our fear of touch, we now have good touch and bad touch which sadly has been born out of society's recognition of child sexual abuse.

By looking at trauma I am suggesting that history holds the experiential stories of people's lives not just as a memory that is lived in the head and mind but is a fully embodied through cellular memory, which is passed on from generation to generation,²⁴⁶ The bodies of women as well as the rest of creation, who were 'alive and feeling' will have soaked up centuries of trauma. Hartley suggests that the 'dualistic experiences are common in modern society, in part as outcomes of religious and cultural values and conditioning and in part due to personal history and trauma'.²⁴⁷ Somatic psychology offers a bridge, an interface between psychotherapy and somatic therapy in which a small but growing number of people are working against centuries of dualistic thinking that has split asunder mind and body, spirit and matter, function and structure, 'we are working in the shadow of mainstream culture, and the integration we seek will take time to evolve as we work to heal the fundamental split within ourselves and deep within the cultural mind'.²⁴⁸

Reconnecting the child with this energetic flow seems to be of great importance if we are to have flourishing female children but is this a step too far for traditional Christianity? As we have seen from the way in which it is felt the Bible should be taught to children the idea of energetic flow could not be further from the minds of these religious educators. Furthermore, the examples that have been considered from the Fathers suggest that trauma and invisibility may have been the order of the day. In pursuit of developing the spiritual life of the child the

²⁴⁴ Adler, *ibid.*

²⁴⁵ Isherwood, 1999, *op.cit.*, p.89-109.

²⁴⁶ I am not talking about generational sin here what I mean by the passing from generation to generation is something to do with how the body remembers and the intrinsic value of memory on a cellular level. So what we embody affects how we act, how we value ourselves and how we are in relationship with one another and the rest of creation. Hartley, 2004, *op.cit.*, p.5.

²⁴⁷ *op.cit.*, p.11.

²⁴⁸ *op.cit.*, p.13.

Fathers may have laid the foundations for centuries of disembodied and damaging practices that turned the body against itself. Somatic psychology highlights how this can never be a good idea since it is in the body that our deepest spirituality dwells. However, if we align with Heyward, Isherwood and others perhaps we can argue that connecting with that energetic flow, which we may wish to call *dunamis*, is essential to an embodied liberating spirituality as breathing is to living. It is from this platform that I move to section three where I suggest that building on the work of feminist theologians it is in the area of the new cosmology and theology that we find ways and stories to tell and live by. Stories that will re-connect us with a flourishing source of spirituality beyond the grip of patriarchy, yet I would argue within the Christian frame. It is to that task that I now turn.

Section 3: A New World View

...incarnational theology can never lend itself to certainty; the God who abandoned the heavens in favour of enfleshed existence gave up the assurance of good/correct and perfect outcomes and instead embraced risk as central to the divine unfolding.¹

'All of us are pilgrims on the Earth and I have heard it said that the earth is a pilgrim in the heavens.'²

'A cosmic society founded in a meaningful universe could become for our world a well spring of bonding energy and artistic creativity, the way cosmologies served our ancestors'³

As we have seen in section one even the most radical sexual theology fails to address the issue of childhood sexuality. Section two demonstrated that the Church Fathers had conflicting ideas of children's qualities and in many cases these qualities attached themselves to the adult believer who was seen as a child of God. We have seen how much of what the Church Fathers declared has been carried through in theology resulting in declarations about children when and if they are mentioned at all. There has been a very welcome return in children's spirituality within the last fifteen to twenty years, but as we saw much of it seems to lack theological underpinning and much does not actually include children in the discourse outside the heteropatriarchal Christian frame of reference of symbolism and language.⁴

My research therefore demonstrates that Heyward's theology of sexuality and spirituality based in the embodiment of godding ourselves and one another through the outpouring of *dunamis*, which is our birthright, appears to be absent in discourses around children. In this third section I wish to rise to Heyward's challenge, acknowledging even her radical theology does not relate to children and develop it through a conversation with the work of Brian Swimme, Thomas Berry, Diarmuid O'Murchu and Catherine Keller in order that it may include children. The work of Swimme and Berry in the new cosmology and theology provides a much larger frame in which to examine our human becoming while the work of

¹ Lisa Isherwood, 'Wanderings in the Cosmic Garden', in Isherwood and Bellchambers, (eds.), *op.cit.*, Ch.7. pp.122-23.

² See Maxim Gorky, *Lower Depths* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993).

³ Nancy Ellen Abrams and Joel R. Primack, *The New Universe and the Human Future: How a Shared Cosmology Could Transform the World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), p.163.

⁴ I would argue here that if language and symbolism betray women and equally entrap men in a delusional cul-de-sac, the child is very soon bought into that entrapment because of the social and symbolic order of the phallic which dictates social construction. Kristeva *ibid.*

O'Murchu in quantum theology and Keller within her theology of becoming and *Polydoxy*⁵, a theology of multiplicity, opens the way I believe to address the obstacles that theology has laid in place in the sexuality and spirituality debate. They enable a truly dynamic starting point for human development, demonstrating that change and diversity lead to flourishing and foster a sense of awe and wonder within the unfolding human. This seems to be a place of huge potential for addressing the sexual and spiritual becoming of the female child. I believe their work in these areas places us beyond a gendered starting point which is hugely beneficial for the girl child and as the story unfolds we begin to see the significance of the female.

It is with this section that my art work continues to take its place as an embodied response to the divine whisper of invitation to the entanglement⁶ of cosmic/human becoming. It expresses what words can simply hint at.

As we can see most Christian theology has not wanted an embodied connection with the material world. This manifested itself in a spirituality heavily influenced by metaphysics and therefore a suspicion of things of this world, especially its sensuous and sexual nature which has often been attached to women more than men. However as we have seen theologians like Heyward and Isherwood give us alternative views and although less radical than the aforementioned theologians it is in the work of Christian theologians Swimme and Berry that we find large scale opportunities for change. They declare the universe story to be our embodied story and by so doing situate us as material beings within a material universe which they declare is our spiritual/theological home. They set the scene for theology to declare that there is nothing beyond this home and in so doing the nature of the metaphysical discourse is changed and transcendence as we shall see takes on a very different form.

Quantum Being

Swimme and Berry's poetic narrative is full of metaphors that delight the senses and feed the creative imagination opening the door to enquiry. They unfold the story which situates the beginning of the universe from a 'single quantum; in its 'primordial flaring forth',⁷ as an outpouring elegance and abundant extravagance in the act of creation, personifying the

⁵ Catherine Keller and Laurel C. Schneider, (eds.) *Polydoxy: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation*, (London, New York: Routledge, 2011).

⁶ The term entanglement is used by both Mae-Wan Ho who uses it in relation to our knowledge of 'morality arising in the mutual entanglement of self, nature and other. Mae-Wan Ho, *The Rainbow And The Worm: The Physics Of Organisms* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Pte., Ltd, 2008), p.322.' Catherine Keller uses it to describe our 'entangled beginnings and ultimately our entangled unknowing because paradoxically, the more we unfold,' Keller suggests 'the greater the entanglement becomes.' Keller, in Isherwood and Bellchambers, *ibid*.

⁷ Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story: From The Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era: A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), p.17.

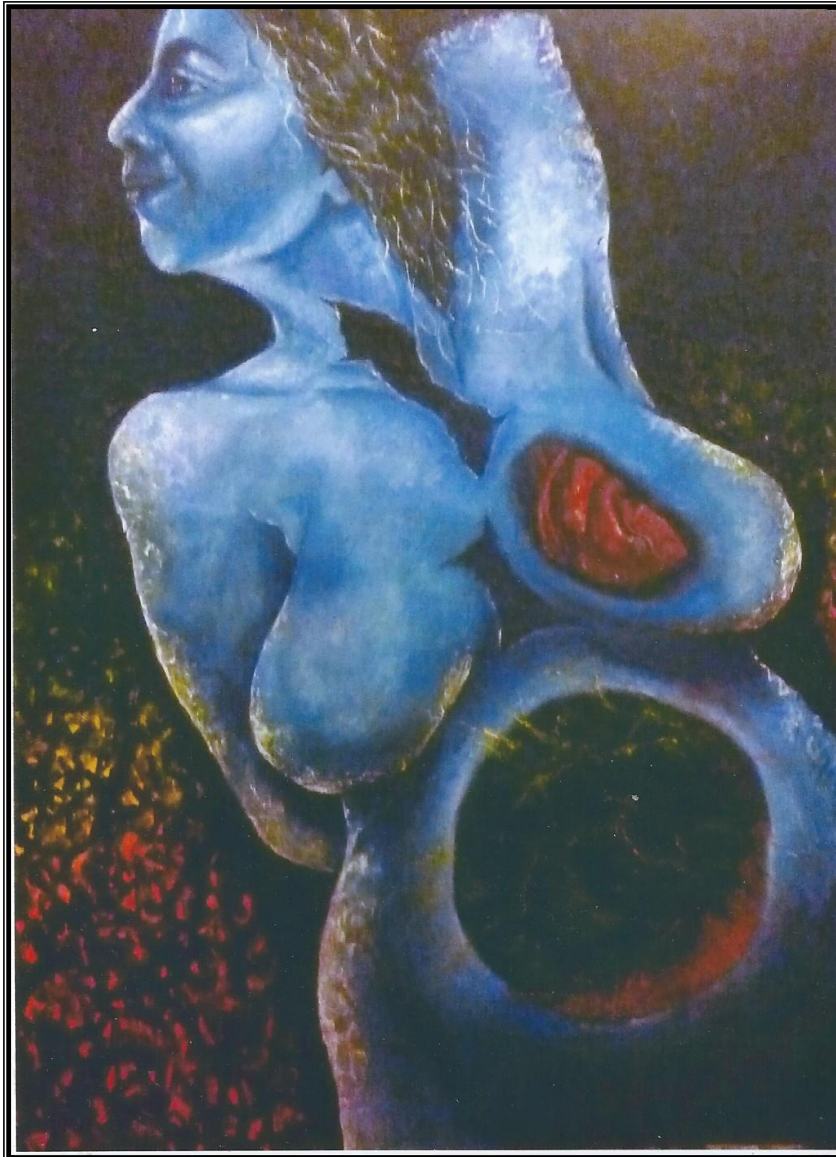


Figure 22 'Quantum Being - Galactic Beauty' Megan Clay 2009

This image depicts the quantum cosmic body of the feminine. This symbolises the sexual and spiritual connection which is not just about sexual relations rather it is the place of power for seeking justice and right relation in the world and the cosmos. We are quantum beings and are beautifully and wondrously made and evolved. Energy flows in and out and around us, in fact we are energy.

The flow between the heart and vulva demonstrate that intimate connection with the emotions and creativity, this is my experience within my body as a woman. Eve Ensler comments on female pleasure, the female body and its safety. She says It is an obvious idea, but like a vagina it needs great attention in order to be revealed'. Eve Ensler *Vagina Monologues* p.xxvi

universe in the idea that it acts out.⁸ They describe how matter comes into being out of the universe's composite makeup in order to make possible another way of seeing, a reality for human understanding enabling us to relate and engage with its magnificent explosive journey that we are interconnected with and so deeply connected to, not just in our minds but also

⁸ *op.cit.*, p.22.

deep inside our bodies. Ultimately showing that within each transcending, transformative moment we are embedded in this magnificent elegance, wonder and paradox. Paradox is something we as human beings ignore because it does not always fit into the nice story due to its paradigmatic shifts of uncertainty. Miriam Therese Winter combines paradox and doxology to connect science and theology thus creating a divine marriage. She says that 'Holy are the offspring from this conjoining. The sacredness of science. The serendipity of sacramentality. With a sensuality of the spirit...Paradoxology means our heart is saturated with divinity, making us totally capable of inviting the whole chaotic world into its embrace'.⁹ This is where I make that divine connection between the sexual/sensual/spiritual experiential lives of the feminine, this is the relationship between the heart and the vulva, which is also my experience. This intimate connection illustrated in Figure 22 above is also a cosmic connection as felt by many women in their intimate lives. So with this in mind I will continue Swimme and Berry's story of the momentous journey that brings to birth the stars and galactic beings in their energetic unfolding made possible because of slight fluctuations,¹⁰ which are born out of the repeated waves of particles coming into and out of existence at the beginning of time. We see that nothing was permanent everything was in flux even after the fundamental laws were established that set the foundational building blocks for all of creation. We are presented with a picture of an unimaginable abundant surge of energy waiting to transform each emergent cosmic becoming. The process of unfolding that makes our incarnational human/divine becoming possible, reminds us that we are in fact infused with this energy and created out of stardust, every human subject is made of the very same stellar dust that creates the stars, galaxies, planets and every animate and inanimate subject.¹¹ It is a particular star's composite makeup created out of the supernovae that makes life as we know it. Our home star billions of years later was created out of this chemical debris, inert matter, the remnant nuclear waste of a supernova named by Swimme and Berry as 'Tiamat'.

If then our sun is now five billion years old and the universe is thirteen point seven billion years old, it was within the timescale of approximately eight point seven billion years after the Big Bang that the potential of our solar system was made possible. The sun was born and the sun gave birth to the planets that make up our solar system. Dr. Helen Mason tells us the relational value of our solar system 'The sun is our planets parent star thus making the other planets the earth's siblings all of which are formed from the dusty remnants of the sun

⁹ Miriam Therese Winter, *Paradoxology: Spirituality in a Quantum Universe* (New York: Orbis Books, 2009), p.23.

¹⁰ Swimme and Berry, *op.cit.*, p.31.

¹¹ Isherwood, 'Wanderings in the Cosmic Garden' in Isherwood and Bellchambers, *op.cit.*, Ch.7., pp.121-136.

and are its children'.¹² This energy that surges forth from the sun that is our life force Dr Mason tells us is never lost or wasted but is always transformed.¹³ She also tells us that

The sun is estimated by scientists to be five billion years old and so is middle aged and will continue for the next five billion years to emit its wondrous light created by its never ending battle between gravity and nuclear fusion. Its paradoxical nature holds both the power to destroy us and to protect and nurture us. Our atmosphere protects us from the periodic solar flares that the sun erupts from its raging surface and spews forth throughout our solar system. As it travels past earth it performs for us the wonderful display of areoles borealis at both northern and southern Polar regions of the earth and continues to surge powerfully beyond earth and the other planets to the outer reaches of the solar system where it forms a protective bubble shielding us from the dangerous microwaves of radiation from outer space.¹⁴

As cosmic subjects we are relatively new in this galactic quantum picture born from ancient primordial beginnings that are constantly in flux. Our human story and our material becoming lie in the quantum moment, the singularity that held the possibility of multiple beginnings. The universe story as told by Swimme and Berry inspired in me the theological/mythical/cosmological paintings that I have created and triggered in me the idea that the universe story told as Christian theology may be a good place to situate the sexual and spiritual becoming of the female child. Here may I remind the reader, that the panels illustrating the cosmic story of the universe's evolutionary journey from the big bang, are situated on the West Downs Campus of The University of Winchester in the form of a mural. They are part of the cosmic walk and the human story of evolution which the spectator/witness is invited to engage with. This art work enthused by Swimme and Berry opened up another space to investigate and combine the theological work of Keller, O'Murchu, body theologian Isherwood and other bodies of scientific research.

Keller's work stirred in me the re-imagining of the feminine in a cosmological way so as included the feminine in the story of creation. This appeared to open new vistas for the body of the female child. My art demonstrates Schüssler Fiorenza's fourth hermeneutic principle of creative actualisation¹⁵ by putting woman back into the scientific/theological narrative cosmologically through art. The first of these images situated below in Figure 23, was painted in preparation for a free standing screen as demonstrated in the image beneath it in Figure 24. The screen is comprised of six panels, three on each side of the screen, depicting the presence of woman at the beginning of the story of the universe which is also our human story.

¹² Dr Helen Mason, University of Cambridge, 'The Seven Ages of Starlight' BBC Four. <http://www.bbc.co.uk> 7th October 2012.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983, *ibid.*



Figure 23 'Invitation to the Cosmic Dance 1', watercolour, Megan Clay 2009.

My notebook illustration in preparation for the free standing screen shown below depicting the 'Cosmic Mother'.

This image shows through the vibration of colour the females co-creative presence within the bigger cosmic picture. She is floating on the cosmological sea of always becoming yet each stage is lived in and enjoyed in the time it takes within that process and holding each tension, as they present themselves in a dance of both mystery and uncertainty.

The cosmic Christic mother's body unfolds throughout each panel of the screen as a symbol of her presence in the evolutionary cosmic story. Her head begins in the big bang and her body is literally formed within each transformative moment of the universes' unfolding wonder and elegance. The sexual/sensual/spiritual interconnected nature of woman is celebrated in this invitation. This is an open invitation to the full knowledge that gives life in abundance and not one full of sin and shame through gaining knowledge, but rather a celebration of relational consciousness and knowledge, embracing the reclamation of what was lost with eve at the fall, in Genesis 1.

Her body winds around onto the other side of the screen and ends at her feet under the sun with the spiralling symbolism of mitochondrial DNA to illustrate the importance of this energetic component of the genetic spiral, which is passed on only by the female through the mothers' line.

This links in with my own experience of bodily acceptance, much of my art is based around this theme of embodiment and how that may look in relation to how we experience our environment on multiple levels of becoming. This also links in with the bio physics of Mae Wan Ho, Rupert Sheldrake and Richard Grossinger whom I make reference later in this section.



Figure 24 'Invitation to the Cosmic Dance 2', panelled screen side 1 and 2, acrylic Megan Clay 2009

She is inviting the observer/witness to join her in the cosmic dance. Writing the cosmos in and on the female body is my way of incorporating my experience with body theology. The paintings hold the symbolic language of the feminine that suggest not only a cosmic Christology, but also one based in *dunamis* as Heyward and Isherwood suggest, which for me has been helpful in linking the female child's embodied experience to her sexuality/spirituality and the divine.

The inter-relationality between these images and the one in the beginning of the introduction is that they are both beginnings of a journey of consciousness. Although the painting at the beginning of the introduction has its starting point in a place of secrecy and holds a position of disparity within an adult/child power sexual relationship it was also the beginning of the journey that has progressively unfolded into the present which helps to explain that change takes time and holds within it a learning process. The painting in the introduction and in Section 3, depict a Christic figure of the female child (me) whose journey because of both my femaleness and sexual vulnerability has been one of rough terrain and one that was difficult at times to make sense of. It has been however transformed after much questioning, resisting, and shouting in a dissenting voice through my experience and learning from those experiences. Entering into academic education enabled me to question and reject the social reality of the heteropatriarchal order, which, was forever battering against my body, reinforcing what I had learned through my experience in the world as a female child and woman. It is because of this that I realised there was another story to tell. This follows a feminist theological praxis where other dissenting voices speak and are awaiting to be heard. The images on the panelled screen are painted in response to that early experience in childhood and my developing womanhood. With confidence and a better understanding of my internal world and journey, I am now putting woman back into the picture and rewriting her story from the beginning through these images which evolved within and so are situated in the body, my body as a metaphor of my own divine cosmic Christic becoming.

Isherwood says: 'we need to keep insisting on the bodies of women as a starting point for Christological reflection and this raises many interesting questions in relation to sex, sexuality and gender.'¹⁶ Woman's experience is seeded in childhood and gathers her constructed identity of the feminine as she journeys, to her detriment, into womanhood, like a stone that gathers moss, the moss of the masculinised form of heteronormativity which imposes fixed definitions of what it is to be female in the world. This disrupts the full potential

¹⁶Lisa Isherwood 'Christology' in Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood, (eds.), *Controversies in Feminist Theologies: Controversies Contextual Theology* (London: SCM, 2007), Ch.4. p.101.

of the creative flow within the feminine. The cosmic story tells us something otherwise and has the potential for multiple possibilities of becoming woman.



Figure 25 'Sophia Wisdom', acrylic, Megan Clay, 2007.

This acrylic painting represents the female cosmic Christa 'Sophia Wisdom'. She symbolises other ways of knowing on an intuitive level thus showing the interconnection with the cosmic nature of everything inside and outside of ourselves the power of knowing within and our interconnection and interdependency with the cosmos. The image demonstrates the location within the internal world of the body in the painting and how that mirrors itself within the cosmos.



Figure 26 'The Folded Fabric of the Universe', ink and watercolour Megan Clay 2008.

Notebook illustration in preparation for panel 1 of the cosmic walk mural, viewed from left to right.

Although science says that space expansion in the beginning was a smooth transaction the turbulence of chaos and its creativity feeds my imagination and leaves me wondering about string theory and the dark energy of space that holds something that we don't quite yet understand in its entirety even though this energy is also in us. This image shows an entangled effect of interconnection within that darkness that seems full of emptiness. This space is charged with the energetic particles of the quantum field that we cannot see. However if we allow ourselves to reconnect we can feel and experience this divine energy and we can join in and celebrate its mystery which is also the mystery of who we are as conscious beings, because we are also part of this creative wonder of evolution that was made manifest and unfolded in its earliest beginnings. Looking into the dense blackness of time and space far beyond our own history what do we see? What mystery does the universe hold and what does this mean to you and I as human beings who are in fact as Thomas Berry suggests part of the earth community. Today we are lucky enough to have our imagination fed by images available to us through science world of the Hubble telescope. The images of nebulae, stars, newly discovered planets and far off distant galaxies of the past and present that are held together by the mystery of space and time, what wondrous sights to behold. This reality is awaiting reconnection a space where our imagination can run wild to new possibilities. Looking into this dense blackness with an imagined reality or even with a visual reality, we can begin to build a picture of an open ended beginning, looking back into the void, that quantum moment to the primordial flaring forth that has given Swimme and Berry the opportunity to talk about the universe story which is in fact ours. Without this story we cannot begin to understand, imagine, theologise or make sense of our existence that relates to every living organism on the planet, be it plants, animals every living thing in the ocean and the earth itself.

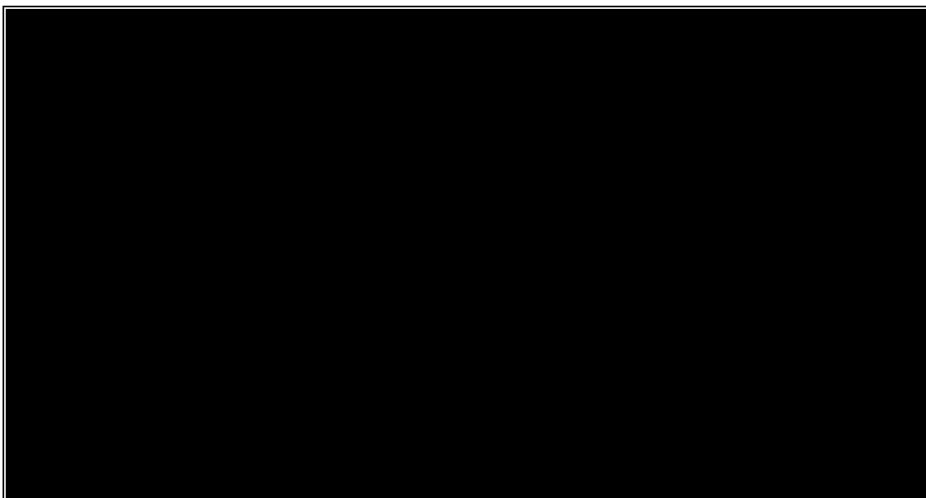


Figure 27 'Looking Back into the Darkness of Time and Space' panel 1 acrylic Megan Clay 2008.

The Material Beginnings of Our Embodied Human Story

This visual story on the panelled mural should be viewed from right to left on the continuum and each of these panels were inspired by Swimme and Berry. The first panel begins with an invitation to the observer to imagine our earliest beginnings by looking deep into the darkness of time and space and to wonder what is held in the depth of that darkness of what seems like empty space. The first image in preparation for panel 1, Figure 26, illustrates a literal folded effect showing the fabric of space that continues its unfolding becoming an unfolding that is full of multiple possibilities.¹⁷ Isherwood writes: 'as you look into the blackness you are looking back over 13.5 billion years in your own history, you are looking into an intense fog of super-heated plasma that impedes light's progress'.¹⁸ Both images depict this darkness that scientists say is full of dark energy and dark matter. Diarmuid O'Murchu reminds us that, 'Darkness is a concept that tends to evoke negative reactions...it has connotations of ignorance lifelessness, oppression, a sense of being lost. Darkness is something to be conquered, controlled and if possible eliminated...Life seems to need the realm of darkness to realise its full meaning and potential'¹⁹ even at a cosmic level. This is an encouraging start for the female who has throughout Christian history been viewed as embodying darkness, chaos which has been equated with sin but now can be understood as the creative centre of life itself.

O'Murchu stirred my theological imagination and I reconnected with my spiritual journey as woman and the way in which the divine, dark energy and matter resonated with my experience - this appealed to me! O'Murchu seems to suggest that in imagining the divine in this way we might understand the process of our cosmic transformation. He says that: 'these spaces are not empty but are full of particles of energy,²⁰ these energy particles were there at the beginning of our 'Cosmogenesis'²¹ and this is the energy that in the event of matter emerging within the great story held the potential of our human beginning and becoming. He states

...spirit power is the driving force of the evolutionary process, the deep secret to unravelling the evolutionary story. But the creative spirit on its own comes to naught. It is a central paradox of evolution that spirit comes to birth in matter and without the material universe it remains not merely

¹⁷ O'Murchu, 2004, *op.cit.*, p.132-33. John Gribbin, *In Search of the Multiverse* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), p.54. Brian Greene, *The Elegant Universe: Superstrings, Hidden Dimensions and the Quest for the Ultimate Theory* (London: Vintage Books, 2000), pp.333-40. Paul J. Steinhardt and Neil Turok *Endless Universe: Beyond The Big Bang* (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

¹⁸ Lisa Isherwood, *Cosmic Walk* (Winchester: Winchester University Reprographics, 2008). p.5

¹⁹ O'Murchu, 2004, *op.cit.*, p.132.

²⁰ Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Evolutionary Faith: Rediscovering God in Our Great Story* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), p.128.

²¹ *op.cit.*, p.128.

hidden but, in a sense, paralyzed. Spirit needs matter for its prodigious creativity.²²

Spirit/energy, I am proposing, is the dark energy that remains a mystery to theologians and scientists alike, the energy that would eventually fill us and sustain life. Who knows how it can unfold in us now if we are open to those possibilities? The universe's expansion reveals the depth of its mystery as it unfolds. This can be used as a poignant opportunity for the child to reflect on her own depth and sense of being and becoming.

Creating stories from what we learn about our cultural, historical and scientific past are valuable in telling truths about who we are as well as 'drawing on stories of experience'²³ as some more holistic educators are now beginning to discover.

The first panel is painted black to symbolise the mysterious darkness of space and time inviting the observer to acknowledge the deep yearning of the human quest²⁴ whose search for deep meaning has been inexhaustible. It also signifies to understand the mystery of the universes imminent birthing forth and unfolding depth. It allows the viewer to wonder not only about our human story of beginnings but also to think about the implication of quantum theory²⁵ that actually enables us to engage with the past, the present and the future,²⁶ all at the same moment in time. Meanwhile there is an extravagant, outpouring waiting to gush forth out of the insurmountable depths of 'Tohu Vabohu'. So also are all the moments of our cosmic evolution onward and forward to the creation of our sun, solar system and planet earth in its hot molten form and all the ages of time on earth until now,²⁷ outside time as we know it, all events are happening all at once. Swimme and Berry tell us, 'though the originating power

²² *op.cit.*, p.41.

²³ See Marni J. Binder, 'I saw the universe and I saw the world': exploring spiritual literacy with young children in a primary classroom, *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 16:1, 2011, pp.19-35 [Accessed on June 11th 2012].

²⁴ Scientists in recent history have been actively searching the Universe for our beginnings in deep space time since the launch of the Hubble Telescope in 1992.

²⁵ The smallest discrete quantity of a physical property such as electromagnetic radiation or angular momentum, the waves of the (CMB) cosmic microwave background along with messengers of light send us the information of the past as if it were happening now. The static we hear in between radio stations is the sound of this CMB that travels through space and time keeping us in touch with these past events. Science is now able to confirm our past through the highly sensitively designed telescopes that enable us to look back in time to these spectacular happenings of our beginnings aided by these messengers. This takes us back to the Planck era which is the period of time just parts of a second after the primordial flaring forth. We still however rely on theoretical ideas for how the Big bang happened, what all the particles are and to what value their properties hold. Brian Cox and Andrew Cohen, *Wonders of the Universe* (London: Harper Collins, 2011), pp.66,69,70-1

²⁶ The theoretical notion that is urgently being suggested by Scientists, Ecologists and feminist liberation theologians are encouraging in their reflections participants toward a co-creative praxis for humanities responsible action that is a possibility with co-operative power relations to create a more sustainable future.

²⁷ By examining geologically the planets rocky substances and what is embedded within them, the plants, water, animal and human bones we can gather the story of our beginnings of life on this planet and the connection beyond this planet to the stars and the rest of our ancient cosmic story.



Figure 28 'Tohu Vabohu - The face of the Feminine', ink and watercolour Megan Clay, 2008.

Notebook illustration in preparation for panel 2 of the cosmic walk mural, viewed from left to right. The same panel below can be seen in the cosmic walk and is viewed from right to left.

This panel represents the face of the deep which in the beginning of the text of Keller's Tehomic space, chaos and the void in relation to the act of creation in Genesis 1, she reveals the feminine face of God. This is a creative moment one of birthing everything into existence and Keller gives this moment female form, because it is only the physicality of the female that gives birth. Chaos has been attributed to woman historically in a denigrating way so this is a way of reclaiming and celebrating this important creative process. Science has its own story as does religion in all its diverse strands of mythical telling and all have their value, but so does a positive story of woman. Keller not only redresses the misinterpretation of Genesis 1 and she also reminds the reader of the global implications of gender inequality and mass destruction of our biosphere and ecosystems. The denigration of women and the subduing and domination of nature throughout Christian history, industrialisation, damage done through new technology and global capitalism have been attributed to this misinterpretation. In this she reminds us that the face of the deep has become global and so this is where we need to begin our understanding of Tohu Vabohu.

It is because of those implications that I am looking beyond patriarchal structures of God the father, but not God the divine or Jesus, in order to get back to the body and the potential that the body holds to act and think differently in relation to the rest of creation in today's world. Furthermore getting back to the body of the child, the female child is important because this is the experiential space where our knowledge and understanding resides and begins from, where the seeds are sewn for future social constructs. This is the space that new possibilities for the female child can spring, to begin her equal participation in the co-creative co-redemptive praxis that Heyward and Ruether speak of. The body is the deep space where our sexual and spiritual selves reside even for the child.



Figure 29 'Tohu Vabohu 2' Panel 2 acrylic Megan Clay 2008

gave birth to the Universe approximately thirteen point seven-billion²⁸ years ago, this realm of power is not simply located there at that point in time, but is rather a condition of every moment of the Universe, past, present and to come'.²⁹

Brian Greene elaborates on this when he talks about the density of space, saying: 'we take for granted that our Universe is made up of three spatial dimensions'³⁰ but claims 'that this not so according to string theory',³¹ maintaining that our universe has so many more dimensions than meet the eye, dimensions that are tightly curled into the folded fabric of the cosmos. These multilayered dimensions of the darkness of the universe are full of particles that move through it at varying speed depending on size and mass. John Gribbin tell us that ...dark energy is a material detected only by its gravitational pull which affects the way galaxies move and how the universe expands. 'There is six times more dark matter than there is "baryonic matter"'.³² Dark energy is an energy that fills all of space...'³³ Abrams and Primack tell us that 'its technical name is Lambda CDM³⁴ (LCDM)...These two invisible dancers are dark matter and dark energy, the two darks of the Double Dark theory.'³⁵ They say that the relevance of this twentieth century discovery and the awesome significance of its contribution to the whole, changes things that were beyond human imagination and opens to the wonder of these two magnificent dancers who tango in and out of the creative tension of 'collapsing galaxies into being (*dark matter*) and accelerating them apart from one another, (*dark energy*) (*my italics*)'.³⁶ Their impassioned tango draws us potentially deeper into the cosmic dance thus showing a more dynamic evolving universe than what was once thought. Swimme and Berry's all-encompassing story of dark energy and matter begins at the quantum moment of what they call the origins of time, 'All the energy that would ever exist in the entire course of time 'erupted as a single quantum - a singular gift - existence'.³⁷ The infinite possibilities of our incarnational becoming began to seed itself inside me in another way through reading their

²⁸ Fifteen Billion years was the original number in this quote but the more accurate number is 17 billion years to date. Cox and Cohen, *op.cit.*, p. 8.

²⁹ Swimme and Berry, *op.cit.*, p.7.

³⁰ In the medieval Christian view God had placed the spheres exactly where they belonged in a "great chain of being" and the place of every creature and institution on the earth was part of the downward continuation of the cosmic hierarchy of the spheres and God's place for each human being and all of creation. Abrams and Primack, *op.cit.*, p.10.

³¹ Atoms are made up of vibrating strings that interact with other particles form relationships that are never separated even when the atoms separate the relationship continues creating an eternal bond – 'this is the mystery'.

³² Baryonic matter is a subatomic particle belonging to a group that undergoes strong interactions, it has a mass greater than or equal to that of the proton, and consists of three quarks. Encarta Dictionary: English UK Computer reference books - **baryon (noun)** [bárrí on] **baryonic (adjective)** [bárrí ónnik]

³³ Gribbin, *op.cit.*, p.37.

³⁴ The ninth letter in the Greek *alphabet – Iota* - Upper & lower case: *Α λ* Name: *Lambda* Trad Eng trans: *I* Mod Greek: */I/ as in light* Reconstructed classical Greek (before 300 BCE): */I/ as in light*

³⁵ Abrams and Primack, *op.cit.*, p.4.

³⁶ *op.cit.*, p.6.

³⁷ Swimme and Berry, *op.cit.*, p.17.

universe story giving me another starting point, as I now understand it to be. This starting point for me lay at the very heart of what science calls the 'big bang', Swimme and Berry's primordial flaring forth;³⁸ that this enigmatic narrative was also our human story enlivened me to a new dawning. Opening for me a whole new perspective on the Christian creation story in Genesis 1. I could see here the possibility to weave a new story one that leans toward a radical equality of gender. Implicating much brighter spiritual, sexual lives for girls that are more within their own realities and experience. The two images below both depict the quantum moment of the primordial fireball that held all future becoming in its elegant show of brilliance that lasted but an instant, a prophetic wordless moment at the beginning of time as we perceive it in our human understanding.

In the very beginning of time and space of our universe, this energetic mass foamed forth in its abundant generosity of 'extravagant outpourings',³⁹ see in Figures 30 and 31 below those incarnational potentialities became possible in all their complexities. Indeed Swimme and Berry tell us that 'If in the future the stars would blaze and lizards would blink in their light, these actions would be powered by the same numinous energy that flared forth at the dawn of time'.⁴⁰

In this universe story which is also ours, Swimme and Berry continue to bring the present back to the primordial time of the young universe's evolving process to demonstrate the composite nature of everything in the making, when they proclaim, 'We cannot regard the dolphin and the flaring forth as entirely separate events...at the base of the serene tropical rainforest sits this cosmic hurricane...Our senses and imagination have been fashioned here. Our bodies and there sensitivities are home here'.⁴¹ This is what excited me about the story, it gave depth, meaning and offered a more organic and intimate connection to creation that I had not found anywhere else. Other starting points did not quite satisfy what I was trying to express in terms of the energy and complexity of human being that could encompass the sexual /spiritual lives of female children with regard to human/divine incarnation, as a truly dynamic lived experience. This is not to say that other points of reference had no value but rather I realised that they were part of a much bigger multidimensional and complex picture: a picture that showed a deeper inclusive revelatory vision that begins in deep space time and that without doubt begins with telling the story of interconnection, interdependency and relationship long before our human shape and form were even considered within the

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ *op.cit.*, pp.18-23.



Figure 30 'The Primordial Flaring Forth', ink and watercolour Megan Clay 2008

Notebook illustration in preparation for panel 3 of the cosmic walk mural, viewed from left to right. The same panel below can be seen in the cosmic walk and is viewed from right to left.

My paintings are based on feeling and emotion together with my visual experience and expression this is revealed throughout each panel and in other pieces in this body of work primarily in colour, form and movement. The swirling spirals and colours highlight the dramatic act of creation setting the scene for its becoming. A sudden bursting forth that is full and abundant for future creative potential which is the universes gift to us, existence itself as Swimme and Berry tell us. In the centre of this swirling mass is the quantum point out of which space begins its unfurling, unfolding presence, the point of emergence was so small and difficult to imagine, but science explains it as the smallest component in physics - quantum.

So the dance of the cosmos begins weaving its way through this first transformative process of the universes initial unfolding. Each transcendental moment after this is interconnected with the previous one, each part intercedes with the other in an unbreakable bond no matter how different each unfolding is that takes place in its own existing form. The divine flash of energy that hurls time and space into existence from this point in time, is very same energy that fuels our sexual/spiritual lives. This energy at this beginning will always begin again because energy is never wasted it is always transformed. These cosmic beginnings are already a multiplicity of entanglements that are deeply embedded within us. How we live this is important as is the use of the energy that is freely given.



Figure 31 'Cosmic Explosion - The Big Bang' panel 3 acrylic Megan Clay 2008

evolutionary/divine process. This was not just within a human frame of reference, but is inter-relational with every sentient form of life on the planet and indeed inter-galactic. As this story unravelled in me I realised this deep connection internally, it was deeply embedded within me and was indeed also a part of my story. This reminded me of those deeply connected times in my life transforming the moment where all was clear, my past would always be my past but somehow I could step through a doorway of another lifetime and world. Now my imagination would take me on a journey of visionary delights. I caught a glimpse of something awesome and I wanted to capture it in colour, it was inside me waiting to burst forth. I experience this in moments of meaningful connections in relationship, while painting or singing and whilst

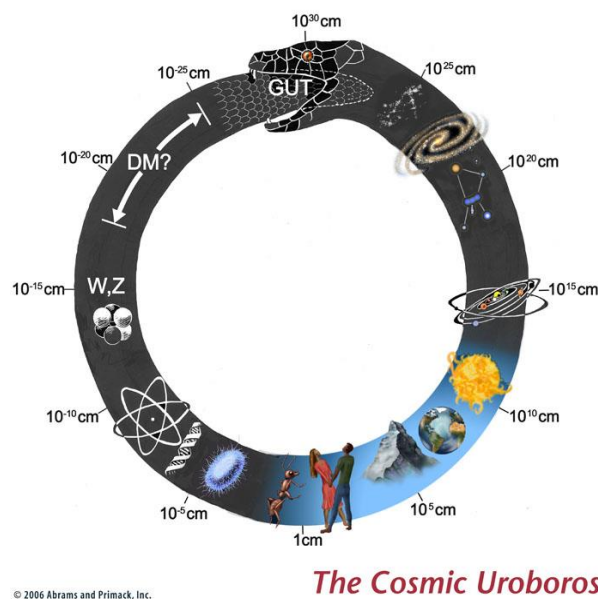


Figure 32 'The Cosmic Uroboros '

Travelling clockwise around the serpent, the icons represent:

A super cluster of galaxies (10^{25}cm).

A single galaxy.

The distance between Earth and the Great Nebulae in Orion.

The size of the solar system.

The sun.

The earth.

A mountain.

Humans.

An ant.

A single-cell creature such as *E.coli* bacterium.

A strand of DNA.

An atom.

An atomic nucleus.

The scale of the weak interactions (carried by the "w" and "z" particles).

And approaching the tail, the extremely small scales, a possible Grand Unified Theory (GUT) that connects the head to the tail.

Abrams and Primack, op.cit., pp.30-1

having impassioned meaningful conversations. I reflected on my being as both a relevant part but also very small in this expansive unfolding creative process. The illustration above depicting the Cosmic Uroboros, which is used with children, demonstrates our relevance and our smallness in the cosmic story.

Smallness is relative according to Abrams and Primack who remind us, ‘we’re at the centre of all possible sizes: there are things as small compared to us as we are compare to the visible universe. To understand our central place on the Cosmic Uroboros, all that children need to understand is the powers of ten...’⁴² Size is not an issue when you realise that everything is interconnected and that we are an important part of but not the whole picture. Abrams and Primack tell us that, ‘Sizes are like doorways within doorways: when you pass through one everything changes’.⁴³ The important part we play in this panoramic vista has to do with our consciousness, the cosmic energy we freely receive that we embody, interacting with what we see, how we act and how we relate to our earth/cosmic environment holistically and to each other.



Figure 33 ‘Interconnection, Interrelation, Interdependent’ Megan Clay 2008

These fragments of the cosmic mural illustrate the interconnectivity of each moment of transformation within the unfolding and becoming of the universe. The three strands of string, from panel 2-15 run through each panel illustrating both the tension and movement on this continuum. The interconnecting strands which I have also described as string theory shows its relational and interdependent value within astrophysics. Even though we are in constant flow the transitional moments that we may think are awaiting transformation are already taking place as we live out our lives.

Within my work I needed to make the interconnection a visual reality which I did through three interwoven pieces of string that illustrates a continuum of movement and transition as each panel transforms on its evolutionary momentum that is demonstrated in Figure 33 above and also throughout each panel of the mural. These three interwoven threads held several different meanings; the interconnectivity of each transformative process also

⁴² *op.cit.*, p.161.

⁴³ *op.cit.*, p.27.



Figure 34 'Transition and Transformation 1', ink and watercolour, Megan Clay 2008

Notebook illustration in preparation for panel 4 of the cosmic walk mural, viewed from left to right. The same panel below can be seen in the cosmic walk and is viewed from right to left.

The bright colours of red, yellow and orange and the symbolic swirling spirals represent the chaos that has given birth to the cosmos. The other half of the panel see the particles disappearing into a long dark night of possibilities, which I have painted in different colours red, blue, green and yellow to show their diversity. These bright colours continue to echo Swimme and Berry's vivid poetic imagery. The contrast between light and dark demonstrate the abrupt transition from the flashing flaring forth, the particles zooming of into the darkness waiting almost a billion years for their transformation.

The annihilating temperature within the initial flaring forth had begun to cool down and the future potentiality for these particles had become a reality. Their dance of communion had begun in a frenzy and now their dance took them into the darkness, swallowing them up embracing them into its mystery, a new thing has begun. Something that we can only imagine had only just begun a new process of being created. The slight fluctuations that were present in the flaring forth gently undulated, accompanying these particles into the hot darkness.

We embody these particles, they help create our form, our being and becoming in the world they have travelled through time and space just to be in us and we in them, they are part of our evolutionary process, this is divine communion and this is what we incarnate.

On reflection I am reminded of the long dark night of the soul and St John of the cross as I look like he did for my beloved. This is a time for stillness and quiet, a time to contemplate this creative process toward transfiguration where we may be held in ongoing awe again in the wonder of creation, this is my beloved awaiting to be seen to be present in all her beauty.

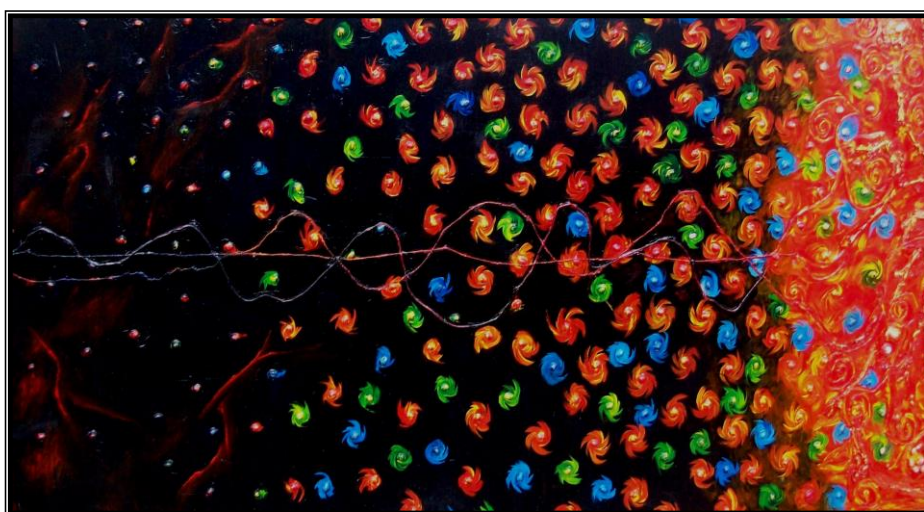


Figure 35 'Particles Dancing into the Darkness' panel 4 acrylic Megan Clay 2008

indicates the vibrational resonance of string theory. This is something that happens within the atomic spheres at a subatomic level in each particle and that is intertwined within everything that is created and born out of the primordial cosmic flaring forth. Astrophysics through string theory demonstrates that once these connections are made they cannot be broken even if they separated, the bond remains within its vibrating resonance and this is part of the mystery of quantum mechanics.⁴⁴ Miriam Therese Winter says we cannot be expected to accept fully that we are quantum beings in a quantum universe unless we understand the principle of what that means.

Quantum means literally a specific amount, and in physics, the whole amount of a unit of energy in the subatomic realm. “Quanta” the plural form of “quantum” means chunk of energy...the whole amount. Everything in existence consists of those chunks of energy...too small to be seen, too swift to be captured, too numerous to even imagine...Those dynamic chunks of energy are constantly in motion. Mechanics is the study of motion and quantum mechanics is the study of energy in motion, of quanta the stuff of life.⁴⁵

It is this vibrating resonance through those bonded relationship within string theory that keeps us feeling and being alive and inter-connected. This is the principle that string theory works on as it vibrates throughout the cosmos within each bonded sub atomic particle. The three strands that interconnect through the panels also symbolise the three main theoretical storytelling models that I am using in the story throughout the panels, these are theology, science and myth although I interweave other theoretical models within my work to give it more substance in order to show its energetic enfleshment.

Swimme and Berry’s story continues with the flaring forth, thick with power, of particles, light and time unfurling at a rate according to its own rhythm. I was struck by this delicate balance of creation within chaotic movement and the knowledge that if our universe had not unfolded as it did, we would not be here. This is to say that ‘the original body of the universe held its balance.’⁴⁶ Panel three in the walk attempts to depict this chaos and balance which is so central to life. The next panel shows the first particles, whose future potential was in that first flash, came in and out of existence immediately as the annihilating heat began to cool down and they began their cosmic dance of liberation, randomly darting around one

⁴⁴ Quantum mechanics is the study of energy in motion within particles. These particles are forever dancing around in frenzy and are unpredictable, only when they are observed do they show something of the way they act to the observer. It is only then can we grasp some understanding to how they act and this is sometimes as a wave and sometimes as a particle. When they are not being observed their activity remains a mystery even to scientists. Gribbin, *op.cit.*, pp.13-35., and Greene, *op.cit.*, pp.3-22

⁴⁵ Winter, *op.cit.*, p.29

⁴⁶ Swimme and Berry, *op.cit.*, p.18



Figure 36 'The Abyss', ink and Watercolour Megan Clay 2008

Notebook illustration in preparation for the cosmic walk mural, panels 5, 6 and 7, viewed from left to right. The same panels below can be seen in the cosmic walk and are viewed from right to left.

Transformation always takes process which is not always seen but we can catch glimpses of this experience in ourselves and others often after the event. These 3 panels in particular represent deep theological meaning as well as sexual/spiritual connections. Panels 5, 6 and 7 are painted how I imagined a long unimaginable dark period of time in blacks, blues and purples with red pulsating through it. This was to give an atmosphere of silence and reflection as we walk through this sequence knowing we are passing through the time span of nearly a billion years of mystery in the void.

The diversity that was to emerge needed a long period of time to become and chemically change.

This long pregnant night, which was to become an environment where the forging of new beings, that were to exist for billions of years before our own existence was going to become possible. This is a creation story that our children need to hear, telling of the many tomorrows that would have to come before we would arrive on our home planet earth. Billions of years of galactic space travel would have to pass before we would reach the potential of our being, to what we would look like, how we would be, what part would we play in this wondrous story, our story. This is a story that encompasses relationality, interconnectedness and resonance with everything that was and is and is to come all that is wholesome, holy and divine.

We can be at our most creative or paradoxically at our most destructive amidst the chaos of our busy lives in fact the former is integral to abundant life. Chaos as the centre of all being, is what artists, dancers, actors, poets and writers thrive on. It is the source of energy that colours their worlds. Sexual and spiritual lives are also interwoven with the stuff of life bringing fulfilment and healing in a broken world through the openness of a humanity that risks uncertainty by expressing themselves freely. It is in the divine depth of our being that our deepest longing and desires can be found. In the depth of this unfolding of space and time the deepest yearning of universe were being formulated.



Figure 37 'The Long Dark Night' panels 5, 6 and 7 acrylic Megan Clay 2008

another, as seen in the images in Figure 34 and 35. The identity of the 'electrons, positrons, the quarks, the neutrinos enjoyed a chaotic freedom... Nothing was predetermined and nothing was permanent even after the fundamental laws were established',⁴⁷ moving frantically across a short space and time they change their rhythm with each transit moment; 'the quarks, the electrons, the protons, the nuons, the photons, the neutrons, as well as their antiparticles...would interact with other particles'.⁴⁸ These two images in Figures 34 and 35, also signal the tail end of the primordial flaring forth full of shining brilliance and illustrates a flash dance that speeds particles away from each other as they disappear into the dark cosmic skies that were opening up the beginning of what we call time, returning to the 'hot pulsating abyss'⁴⁹ from whence they came.

The hot soup like conditions that Swimme and Berry describe adds an intensity to what we may imagine within that long dark period of mysterious becoming. The hardly noticeable waves, 'slight quantum fluctuations'⁵⁰ say Swimme and Berry, produced by that powerful primary flash along with the particles, were now resonating within the depth of this 'dark uninterrupted night in preparation for and awaiting its next transfiguration'.⁵¹ The three panels five, six and seven seen in Figure 36 and 37 also above, continue this theme of dark pulsating metaphors, taking us into an incubation period of darkness where the young universe's imagination and mine, within my painting, germinate this transition. It brought to my mind an analogy of the embryonic process of multiple foetuses developing within the maternal womb of deep space time. The hardly noticeable fluctuations in the smoothness of unfolding space and time gradually built up toward the end of this long hot dark night. This immeasurable womb holds the possibilities of multiple births that would take aeons; in fact approximately half a billion years would pass before future eventualities become possible. This transfiguration into light involved the transformation of the primal energetic mass into newly evolved beings.

This is indeed a time for reflection of all that dwells in the darkness of time and space and within us. Christianity speaks of the light bringing us truth, hope and certainty and with darkness sin and uncertainty. Such polarisation and paradoxes betray us in the light of the vastness of space and the uncertainty and risk it holds within its creative and destructive forces that are beyond our control both human and otherwise. In the depth of darkness we also find

⁴⁷ *op.cit.*, p.20

⁴⁸ *op.cit.*, p.22.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ *op.cit.*, p.19.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.31.

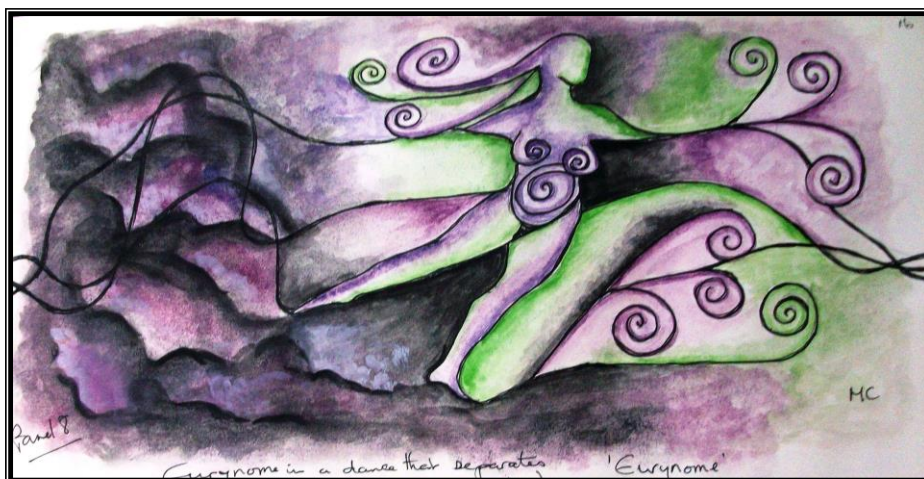


Figure 38 'Eurynome Dancing' ink and watercolour Megan Clay 2008

Notebook illustration in preparation for panel 8 of the cosmic walk mural viewed from left to right. The panel below can be seen in the cosmic walk and is viewed from right to left.

Eurynome dancing wildly from darkness into light followed by a southern wind she had gathered to create something new and bringing light into the darkness. The colours within this image symbolise the light gaseous elements of hydrogen and helium and they are also the colours of the suffragette movement. The spiral symbols represent the feminine/ Divine and the Goddess and can be seen within the fractal patterns of nature and our spiralling incarnation within the cosmos itself. One of the stories of which there are many strands tell us that Eurynome is lonely and she that is looking for pleasure. It is here she begins to dance and dancing gives her pleasure as she feels the fluidity of her embodied movement stirring up a wind. The wind follows her and impregnates her, this great Goddess who dances amidst chaos holding the power of creation within her and she takes great joy in her work. Other stories from Greece tell us that Eurynome the great creatrix was ruler of the oceans and had a temple in Archadia.

There are echoes of the trinity of Christianity within the symbolism I have woven into this painting, which, were known prior to the Christian era as the triple Goddess that Patricia Monaghan notes is reflected and embodied as mother of all pleasure in the famous sculpted and painted images of the three graces. This triune imagery could be seen to replicate itself in Christianity within the iconic painting of the trinity painted by Russian Orthodox artist Andrei Rublev.

The three stages of female development from maiden, mother to crone can also be a useful way to ritualise and celebrate liturgically we who are diversely embodied women. This echoes Schüssler Fiorenza's creative actualisation, which is the feminist hermeneutics that parallels action research. This is the way that we, as women, create knowledge of who we are by transgressing the boundaries of age race, shape size and capability within this celebration of life. This liturgical act could include whatever art form speaks creatively to whom within that process, enabling gifts to be brought to table to share and discover the common ground in communion with one another.



Figure 39 'Eurynome and the Dance of Creation' panel 8 acrylic Megan Clay 2008

the light that is how the two are measured. This is what my art reveals for me and it is through diving into the depths of darkness that I have discovered and recovered vitality and life amidst pain and anguish. Art and creativity is full of paradox and like the universe it depends on how we live in the tension that each paradox creates. Paradox goes hand in hand with chaos and creativity, O'Murchu notes that 'now science is looking chaos seems to be everywhere and it provides the crucial link to interpret and comprehend aspects of universal life that had previously tended to be regarded as deviant'.⁵²

Here was the great shuddering of birth pangs, these hardly noticeable, resonating quantum ripples of becoming; shock waves of the primordial cosmic event rippling toward the next birthing process. The energetic particles that had been dancing in and out of existence and relationship through the long dark night, were preparing the first galactic bodies into being. Hydrogen protons started a new dance of infusion, as their frantic dance increases they bond together, when four of these protons bond together they change chemically and produce the gaseous element of helium which is transparent and light;⁵³ these new beings brought forth light, they were doing a new thing. This is illustrated through a painting of Eurynome in the cosmic walk; varying shades of purples and greens swirling around her as she dances bringing ever closer the possibilities of future life along the continuum of creation. Eurynome has to be the most important Goddess of Pelasgian myth. She is the great goddess, mother creatrix and here she is in the image in Figures 38 and 39, with the North and South wind trailing behind her, dancing wildly from darkness to light, she is the whisperer and creator of both darkness and Light enabling future growth and new cosmic beings. The symbolism within this panel echoes my feminist liturgical heart of connection and movement toward liberation and equality which can be seen in the metaphors described in the caption within the text box.

I have also mentioned below the interplay between Christian iconography⁵⁴ and pagan symbolism through the three graces from Greek mythology reinterpreted through paintings and sculptures by many historical male artists⁵⁵ who are associated with beauty, creativity and pleasure,⁵⁶ to be revered or objectified. This is why I have painted Eurynome in her role as creator to reclaim an empowered position for woman as a reminder of her co-creative

⁵² O'Murchu, 2004, *op.cit.*, p.132.

⁵³ Einstein's theory of Energy and Mass $E = mc^2$

⁵⁴ Andrei Rublev 1410 http://www.wellsprings.org.uk/rublevs_icon/

⁵⁵ For example see, The Three Graces by Antonio Canova, carved marble, Rome, 1814-1817,

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/t/the-three-graces/>

also, The Three Graces Rubens, Peter Paul (b. 1577, Siegen, d. 1640, Antwerpen)

http://www.wga.hu/html_m/r/rubens/23mythol/55mythol.html

⁵⁶ Patricia Monaghan, *The New Book of Goddesses and Heroines*, (Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1997), p.63.



Figure 40 'Galactic Cloud' ink and watercolour Megan Clay 2008

Illustration in preparation for the cosmic walk mural, panel 9 is viewed from left to right. The same panel below can be seen in the cosmic walk and is viewed from right to left.

The panel below is collaged with netting from supermarket fruit containers and bird fat ball holders and budding branches of an apple tree that had been pruned in the late autumn of the previous year. I was trying to create a gossamer effect together with an analogy of new life and the symbolism of the apple, all these ideas were flooding through me as I glued and painted them. Theology was being created through my thought and action onto the panel and so it was with every panel of this mural.

This image illustrates the interaction of energy drawing matter to itself in relation to those slight fluctuations at the beginning of time. Colour and form demonstrate the next transition made from darkness to into light. The transformative process would have taken some time each moment of chemical and nuclear union and interaction marks its way across the expansion of space as it pushes on into its becoming.

My mind wanders to aspects of energy in children and how as children we have this in abundance, when we are young we are ablaze with this energy. This is that very same energy fusing hydrogen and helium to make light that also fuels the stars and galaxies. We do not own this energy but it is readily available to us to interact with through our lives to transform ourselves and others as we live those lives out. Our spiritual unfolding is part of this energetic tapestry that is also part of a unified field of being and becoming which I would argue affects our religious lives. We like the unfolding cosmos in the past are forever moving and changing we are not fixed and are not in control. The dance goes on in us and around us. It is time for us to consciously choose how we can enter this dance and weave our futures into the tapestry of an already existing web of life.

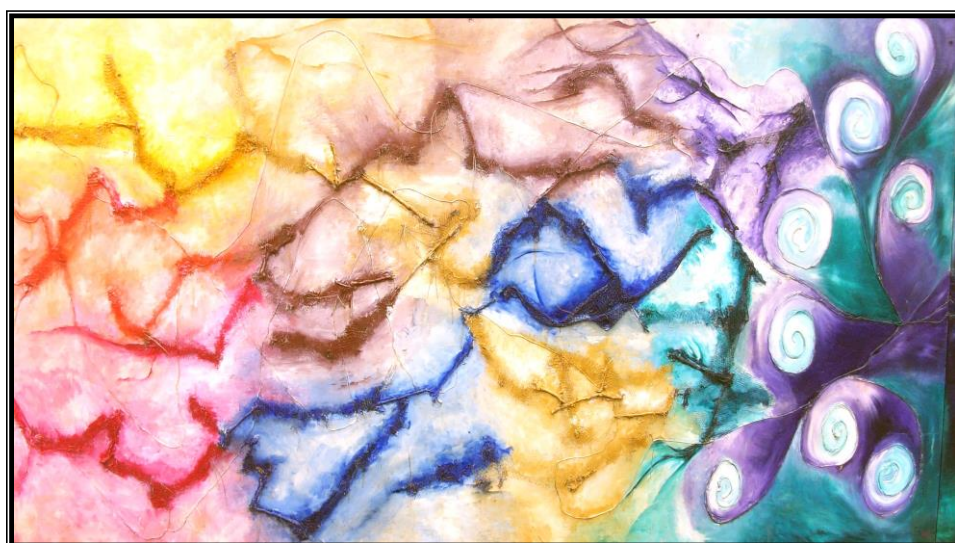


Figure 41 'Galactic Cloud – Then There Was Light', panel 9, acrylic Megan Clay 2008,

potential and her capacity for desire and pleasure to be met in this interplay of myth and theological meaning. This also reflects my own experience of that which I have found in the darkness of the abyss within and have brought forth into the light through my art, which is for me divine revelation.

Light has then come into the universe and the interaction of these new beings would birth the primary giant stars into being, producing what Brian Swimme and Evelyn Tucker tell us are vast cumulus clouds billowing out. What comes to my mind is a great orchestration as the universe comes alive with something new. Strands of light like gossamer webs were strung across the heavens, a beauty to behold as seen in the images below in Figures 40 and 41.

After a billion years a trillion clouds each with its own set of dynamics escaped into the expansion of the universe bringing radiance into what had been an aeon of dark uninterrupted night. Swimme and Berry tell us that

Hydrogen is not inert, dead or passive matter. Rather each hydrogen atom seethes with its own particular energies, instant by instant. The hydrogen is an accomplishment requiring constant communicative action amongst its constituent parts – the proton, the electron and the photon into a coherent whole is hydrogen. Hydrogen is this new power, this new centre of activity, this new presence in the universe. It is a new actuality, a thing that acts in a new way.⁵⁷

This is then the beginning of a communion that will grow within the bodies of these evolving new beings. Bodies within bodies that we cannot deny being part of and have evolved, from within, communion of all created order has its place here in the midst of chaos. In Figure 40 and 41, the tail end of Eurynome can be seen as the conductress of this orchestration, calling each note into play. Her green and purple finger like tendrils of cosmic ripples reach into the light creating this musical score that gradually builds up into an explosive concerto, as it reaches a crescendo of multiple mutability of form. Matter is transformed in relation to itself as it plays its grand masterpiece.

Out of these translucent gaseous filaments full of light and gas spew forth these 'giant clusters of galactic clouds'.⁵⁸ The separation of the gaseous elements of the great new light of the universe had evolved into the next stage bulging clouds of hydrogen and helium drawing these great resonating ripples of matter made up of what seems like free flowing particles, yet they each have their own organisational skills. Another transition is taking place the separating gaseous clouds begin swirling from within taking a vast passing of time to get to the stage where we would see galaxies similar to our own forming. The sights in the heavens I would

⁵⁷ Swimme and Berry, *op.cit.*, p.32.

⁵⁸ Brian Thomas Swimme, and Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Journey of the Universe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), p.18.



Figure 42 'Billowing Cloud Clusters 1' watercolour and ink Megan Clay 2008

Notebook illustration in preparation for panel 10 for the cosmic walk mural, viewed from left to right. The same panel below can be seen in the cosmic walk and is viewed from right to left.

The primary colours I have painted in this image correspond to their future potential of the multiple colours they will produce within the galaxies that these galactic giant clusters will burst into. This illustration demonstrates the transition from the translucent misty veil of galactic cloud breaking into trillions of galactic clouds. These fragmented clouds billowed forth with the promise of a new thing being created as the universe brings forth these light beings. Depicted here as bulbous masses of light and matter, blues reds green yellow and white against a back drop of a much cooler cold dark universe.

The unwavering quest to bring further transition continues within these clouds of hydrogen and helium as the amplified ripples of those primordial slight fluctuations interact and become more relationally intense. The complexities of integrated systems that work within our own bodies can begin to be recognised here inside this chemical interaction. This pre galactic interstellar activity tells us the story of our yet to be transformed selves in the future, yet, we are also here in this moment. These galactic clouds will produce the dominant giants that will reign throughout the universe for billions of years to come recoding everything in their path as they create a new universe in this evolutionary adventure. These soon to become giants are beyond our human and monotheistic control, they have their own laws and creative dynamics and are part of our cosmic community.



Figure 43 'Billowing Cloud Clusters' 2 acrylic Megan Clay 2008

imagine although impossible to withstand, must have been wondrous to behold during which the multiple atomic processes were playing out their inter-relational minutiae.

The relationship of atoms is a quantum reality and so holds their own mystery; however physics tells us that

Hydrogen emerges out of primordial universe activity, but has its own distinct modalities. An electron when alone will interact with a particular kind of photon, but this same electron in a hydrogen atom will not interact with that photon. An electron interaction with the wide universe differs, depending on whether or not it is within a hydrogen atom. Within the hydrogen atom a new mode of presence is established. The interaction between photons and hydrogen, between hydrogen and hydrogen, or between hydrogen and helium are all new. The laws constituted among the elementary particles continue but a new weave of order emerges with the creation of these primordial atoms...Hydrogen enters and weaves a new universe.⁵⁹

So once this transition was established nothing from the distant past could determine what would happen next, in this moment of time except what had come out of the recent atomic fusions which had their own organisational skills. 'New presence emerged; powers of self-determination erupted from each of these clouds. The galaxies were born...'⁶⁰

This great light has come into the darkness, reminiscent of a reflection that we also incarnate the light of stars, so from those dark depths into the light we come not yet knowing. The prophet Isaiah reminds us, 'The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness — on them light has shined'.⁶¹ This light which exceeded the flash of the primordial flaring forth in its brilliance swept its way into vast density waves dancing continuously with each sweeping movement, far reaching each time beyond itself 'into a central concentration of matter and energy so extreme it punctured the very fabric of space and time'.⁶² The black holes created out of this activity were spinning at an immense velocity, a revolutionary speed that sent out from its centre repeatedly vast varying density waves. Each one sometimes superseding the other, shocking and condensing hydrogen and helium clouds rapidly into producing thousands of stars as each wave swept a pathway through space and time, lighting the way ahead through the dark matter and dark energy. This wondrous new being 'helium soars with activity. 'In the time it takes a human being to sneeze a single helium atom has had to organise a billion different evanescent events to establish its

⁵⁹ *op.cit.*, p.33.

⁶⁰ *op.cit.*, p.34.

⁶¹ Isaiah, 9:2-7.

⁶² Swimme and Berry, *op.cit.*, p.33.

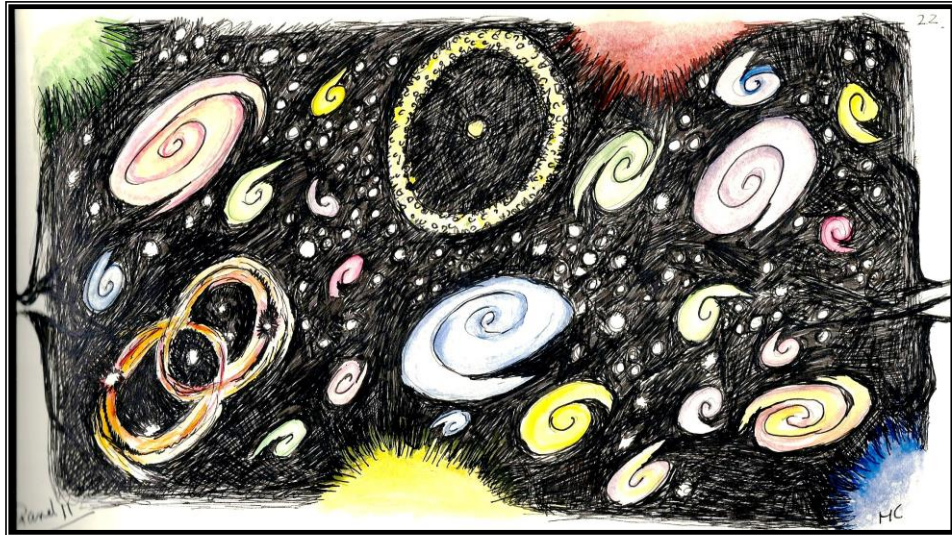


Figure 44 'The Birth of Galaxies', panel 11, ink and watercolour Megan Clay 2008

Notebook illustration in preparation for panel 11 of the cosmic walk mural viewed from left to right. The same panel below can be seen in the cosmic walk and is viewed from right to left.

I have tried to show here on panel eleven, the different forms of galaxies and their diversity. Various sizes of spiral galaxies that have at their centre super massive black holes surrounded by a whirling mass of gas and myriads of stars. Star burst galaxies, Antennae galaxies, Active galaxies, Lenticular galaxy. The first Galaxies birthed into existence spinning in their own space in the cosmic walk. On one of these gossamer filaments hung the Virgo cluster a self-contained gathering of thousands of separate galaxies. Our own Milky Way on one side and Andromeda on the other were bonded together with these clusters. This is what Thomas Berry describes as a bonded community of the cosmos of which we and the whole of planet earth are part of. This bond can never be broken but seems to be mostly ignored and not given the reverence it deserves. The beginning of a bonded community means that everything is interrelated and is affected by each interaction that takes place within it. Meaning there is nothing outside it even the space that surrounds this activity plays its part. The gravitational pull and the expanding space are the tensions that hold everything together including everything that was and is and is to come, this is how together with light that we can understand the universes past.

This is the universe that lives on a knife edge that Swimme and Berry tell us about our own Milky Way exists in this way and by doing so enables great beauty to unfold in its peace and balanced tensions of fecundity. The creative activity of this bonded community is the reason we are here and it was because of this subtle, intricate cosmic dance that we can continue into a promising uncertain future that continues to proceed on that knife edge into multiple possibilities.



Figure 45 'Clusters of Galaxies' panel 11, acrylic Megan Clay 2008

helium presence in the world'.⁶³ Which suggests a magnificent show of inter-relational quality within the creation of this early bonded community.

The Galaxies that initially were spinning close together would billions of years later rapidly expand apart with the inflation of the universe and would produce a second generations of stars which would burn for an equally long time, cooking within them the elements that would produce sentient life in the future including our consciously evolving human lives. For billions of years these spiralling and elliptical galaxies⁶⁴ began to move away from each other with an accelerated speed, smaller and closer together than they are now within the cosmic expansion.

The universe's first stars, believed to be 30 to 300 times as massive as our Sun and millions of times as bright, would have burned for only a few million years before dying in tremendous explosions, or "supernovae." These explosions spewed the recently cooked chemical elements of stars outward into the universe before the expiring stars collapsed into black holes or were destroyed.⁶⁵

These spinning galaxies became nurseries for these new light beings that were to inhabit the cosmos for billions of years to come, this was brilliant light that was to shine in the darkness. Over the billions of years these giant gaseous, spinning, nebulae masses produced a third generation of stars out of their multiple cosmic explosions, one of which when it went supernovae, as panel twelve illustrates,⁶⁶ it sent tons of stellar debris out into space. Tiamat has many names usually of a powerful but destructive nature. This is another creation story marking the dismemberment of the Goddess. Here remaking and remembering, weaving and mending are an important part of reclaiming the bodies of woman. Susan Iles has written an article on reclaiming the sacred by bridging the dualistic gap between heaven and earth, male and female but equally understanding the positive power of the creative feminine and her participation in that which is sacred and divine through multiple mythic stories. 'The dragon Tiamat is regarded as the mystery of Chaos, primal and uncontrollable, passionate in her unchecked creative energy. She is the frightening unknown of formless primordial matter sacrificially recreated as the very beauty of Earth itself.'⁶⁷ These stories come in all shapes and sizes they also come in lessons of self-sacrifice which has been misinterpreted by Christianity and used as an act of control in particular to dominate women.

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Nicolas Cheetham, *Universe: A Journey from the Earth to the Edge of the Cosmos* (London: Quercus, 2007), pp.164-208.

⁶⁵ http://webbtelescope.org/webb_telescope/science_on_the_edge/#first-light

⁶⁶ Swimme and Berry, *op.cit.*, p.49.

⁶⁷ Susanne Iles, *The Dragon and Creation: Reclaiming the Sacred in our Lives*, Article, pp.1-3. <http://www.susanneiles.com/essaycreate.html> [Accessed on 16th January 2011].



Figure 46 'Tiamat', ink and watercolour Megan Clay 2008

Notebook illustration in preparation for panel 12 for the cosmic walk mural is viewed from left to right. The same panel below can be seen in the cosmic walk and is viewed from right to left.

This supernovae that scientists Swimme and Berry name as Tiamat was unable to regenerate within herself the energy that had once sustained her former shining brilliance. She was now ready to disperse the elements that had been cooked within her and was ready to offer new life. As she draws them to herself imploding and finally in her death throws she explodes outwardly burning off the remainder of her body leaving a core of iron and remnants of interstellar dust to float out into the cold blackness of the universe.

Swimme and Berry use this analogy of Tiamat because the earth and nature which have for a long time been feminised along with chaos and so to fit in with the myth of woman's body being the sight of creation of everything out of interstellar debris, matter/mater. However the heroic myth that this story is taken from is Tiamat and Marduk and has been consciously responsible throughout the historical metanarrative, until now, for the violence and denigration of women. Part of this violation has contributed to the disruption of the creative flow and embodiment of women. Tiamat has many names usually of a powerful destructive nature which can be seen as a projection of a certain masculine mindset that marks the dismemberment of the Goddess. The dismembered body of Tiamat is controlled within the story as we are told that different parts of her fragmented body are used to create the biosphere that supports earth's complex life forms and the planet itself. This story of subjugation of women is continued in the Christian story of Eve in relation to her sinful part in the fall of mankind. This Mesopotamian myth has recently through an article by Susanne Iles heralded in chaos in many mythic Dragon forms which is a way back to reclaim and remember women's bodies in an empowering way. (this is referenced in the footnotes and the main body of work above and below).

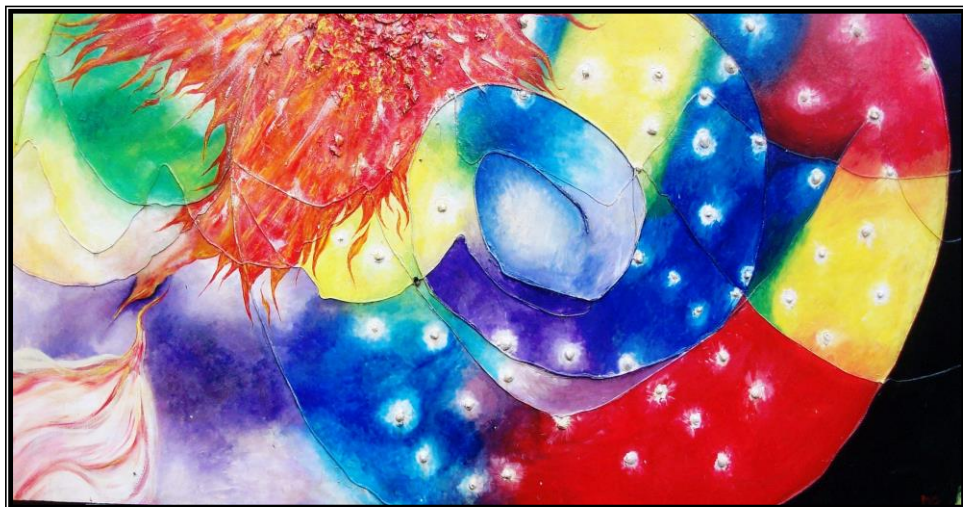


Figure 47 'Tiamat's Body Exploding', panel 12, acrylic Megan Clay 2008

Dragon legends support our understanding of creation forged by our ancestors and their beliefs and lessons of self-sacrifice and transformation can be found in many of the dragon myths, including the legends of Tiamat and Quetzalcoatl.⁶⁸ Iles tells us that

One of the most important dragons of creation mythology is the Australian Rainbow Serpent, its symbol being the rainbow bridging Heaven and Earth. Given the Dreamtime is connected to our world, the creation story of the 'Ancestors and their mythical past is simultaneously the creation of the present and our future'.⁶⁹ According to Aboriginal cosmology the link must be maintained if our future is to be made manifest.⁷⁰

This also links in with the Cosmic Uroboros that scientists Abrams and Primack talk about in Figure 32 on page 157 in relation to the importance of storytelling and the one story that can include all stories regardless of gender, sexuality, colour or creed, but has to incorporate the powers of ten in relation to size on a cosmic scale.

Our stories of cosmic transformation continue as Swimme and Berry tell us with a scientific poetic ease that 'after Tiamat's searing explosion which would have been a single week long flash of brilliance, that would catch the attention of every watchful creature in the galaxy...when this was finished, the deeper meaning of her existence was just beginning to show through.'⁷¹ Out of this floating remnant, shocked by our own galaxy, the Milky Way, gave birth to some ten thousand new stars one of which was our sun.

The Stella core of Tiamat had forged tungsten, copper and vanadium. She vanished as a star in her grand finale of beauty, but the essence of her creativity went forth in wave after wave of fluorine, astatine and bromine. Tossed into the night sky with the most extravagant gesture of generosity, were caesium, silver and silicon...magnesium, osmium, gallium rhodium and titanium - each a new world of power to cast forth by the quillionth unfolding of the universe. For any worlds intelligent enough to receive these were oceans of palladium, germanium and cadmium.⁷²

The cloud of dust that revolved around the spinning star, which was in the future to be known as our nurturing, life giving sun. This matter was to become the bonded community of our solar system, eight planets which will eventually form our home planet earth.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ James R. Lewis, *The Dream Encyclopaedia* (Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 1995), p.200.

⁷⁰ Iles, *op.cit.*, p.3.

⁷¹ Swimme and Berry, *op.cit.*, pp.60-1.

⁷² *ibid.*

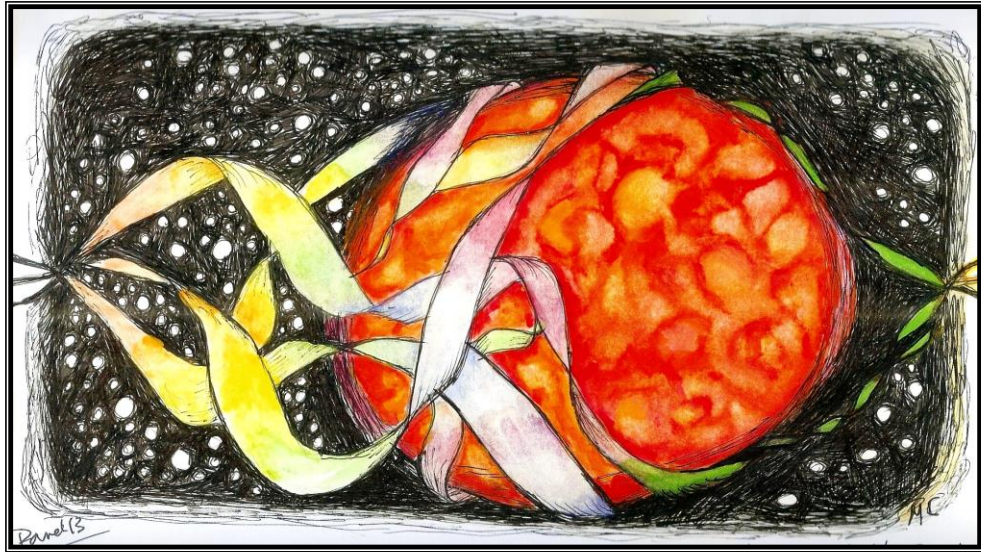


Figure 48 'The Birth of the Sun', ink and watercolour Megan Clay 2008.

Illustration in notebook in preparation of panel 13 for the cosmic walk mural viewed from left to right. The same panel below can be seen in the cosmic walk and is viewed from right to left.

The birthing of our sun was as dramatic as any of the interstellar vista of newly born or dying stars. The stars that blazed into being at the same time as our own sun would have developed differently. Some would have become brown dwarf stars, others became super blue giants that quickly flashed into the incandescence of new supernovas. Others became slumbering red stars.

The elements that were forged in the belly of Tiamat were new, their potential was only dreamt about in the primordial fireball and the long night of infinite possibilities that led to the transformation of darkness into light. It would take ten billion years before that dream became a reality this was never predetermined and only ever a possibility. The reality was that these elements would support diverse forms of life eventually on earth. Other elements like calcium would help form the crust of the earth from which we are made, teeth, beaks to eat with, nails and claws to hold food and tools, bone to support our en fleshed bodies and hair to cover, protect and warm the bodies of many living animals. Phosphorous that would enable photosynthesis which in turn would create the oxygen we breathe. Sulphur that is held within the bowels of the earth in its hot volcanic domain that helps sculpt our ever changing landscape. Carbon and nitrogen would be woven into our genetic coding as memories deeply and even deeper infiltrating our cells and consciousness so that we would know the beauty of our world which we will remember through each generation of our ancestral storytelling.



Figure 49 'The Sun Being Born ', panel 13, acrylic Megan Clay 2008.



Figure 50 'The Birth of the Solar System 1', ink and watercolour Megan Clay 2008

Notebook Illustration in preparation for panel 14 for the cosmic walk mural viewed from left to right. The same panel below can be seen in the cosmic walk and is viewed from right to left.

The nine planetary bodies of our solar system on panel fourteen show the sun at the centre of a spiralling dust cloud of bright orange vibrating against the blue/black of the quantum universes backdrop that is ablaze with tens of thousands of stars as depicted in Figure 51 below on panel 14.

Once granted existence the sun also showed its own organising abilities as it blasted of all the elements that were left hovering about it. The gathering of momentum sent it spinning what remained into a multi-bonded disc of matter out of which arose the bonded community of our solar system. The sun at the centre with Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Pluto would all irrespectively find their place. I am reminded of Romans 8:39 'Neither height nor depth can separate us from the love of God' when I think about this gravitational bond that holds everything in place throughout the universe within our solar system and our humanity. Making Christological connections with what we incarnate is part of this yet another of the universes powers of transformation turning energy again into a new thing. Reassuring for me the message that Ephesians 3: 18-19 brings about that incarnational value, consciousness, interdependence and interconnection. ¹⁸ 'That you may have the power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, the height, the depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. So that you may be filled with the fullness of God'.



Figure 51 'The Birth of the Solar System 2', panel 14, acrylic Megan Clay 2008

The formation of these planets took millions of years spinning and cooling and crashing violently into each other then gradually settling into some sort of ordered orbit: Pluto, Neptune, Uranus, Jupiter, Saturn, Mars, Earth, Venus, Mercury and the multiple satellites and moons orbiting each planet in a variety of shapes sizes and numbers. The bombardment of the planets by asteroids continued leaving huge craters upon the surface of these cooling spinning heavenly bodies. Mercury remains hot along with Venus because of their close proximity to the sun.

The revolving gases around the sun heralds a new phase of the universes unfolding. The very existence of these gases had required five billion years of stellar labour. The elements composing this wispy shadow...sparkled with each of their own unique properties, each a quantum personality with promises for activity beyond the imagination of the earlier universe.⁷³

To bring this powerful knowledge into our consciousness is important because it involves all of us and takes us outside the realm of religion and a fixed notion of a monotheistic divinity.⁷⁴ Furthermore it introduces the complex and intricate web that we are all woven into yet are so full of diversity. Diversity is one of the most difficult concepts we as human beings find hard to accept even though we talk about it a lot. Yet, the universe has produced difference in abundance and flourished because of it.

The creation stories and biblical myths within Christianity have their place in our heritage only if they empower us for change. The story of creation that the earth was created in six days five to six thousand years ago cannot hold power over Christian lives when we have been shown a different story through science. However this story still needs reverence and consideration as it attempts to speak of divinity within the awesome wonder of creation and evolution and to enable humans to have meaning and ways to live life on planet earth. Out of this knowledge we can make conscious choices. This is because making conscious choices are paramount to where we go in the future with our co-creative potential, first with us then inevitably with our children, their children and their children's children. Returning to the scientific creation story, earth remained as hot molten rock for millions of years and due to its toxic environment it was unable to support life. Within this atmosphere primordial life came and went unable to reproduce itself. Several chemical changes had to happen before the atmosphere was cool enough to sustain primitive bacterial life of the single cell Mitochondria⁷⁵ to begin its reproductive process. Life itself would have to go through billions of years of

⁷³ Swimme and Berry, *op.cit.*, p.43.

⁷⁴ O'Murchu, 2004, *op.cit.*, p.89.

⁷⁵ O'Murchu, 2008, *op.cit.*, p.16.

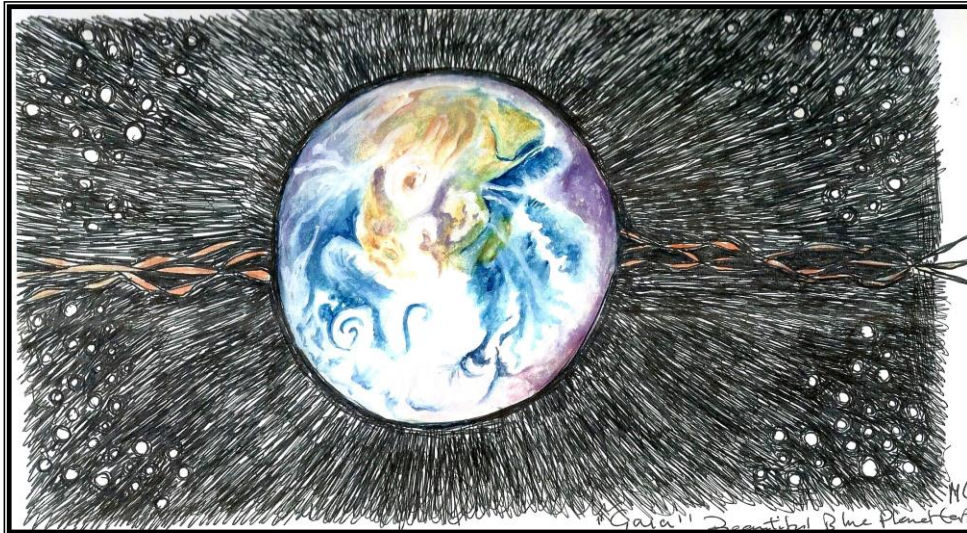


Figure 52 'Planet Earth', ink and watercolour Megan Clay 2008

Notebook Illustration for panel 15 for the cosmic walk mural viewed from left to right. The same panel below can be seen in the cosmic walk and is viewed from right to left.

'Planet Earth' This image is painted as we might see earth today however our planet would have looked very different whilst it was spinning to establish its position in our solar system. For several hundred million years the earth suffered the shock of collisions with meteors and asteroids on its not yet solidly formed surface. Earth melted under this constant battle of interstellar material boiling night and day for half a billion years. Matter existed as liquid or gas that flowed from one form to the other providing an incessantly creative chemical womb from which Aries the first living cell arose four billion years ago.

The onslaught on the earth today is a human one so reconnecting to the primordial womb of our begetting as O'Murchu suggests is crucial to how we respect and work with our home planet. Finding another way is important to our holiness, our spiritually embodied lives are also in jeopardy if we do not.

Radical humanity begins here with the earth that has been defined as female. The correlation between how we have treated the earth and how women's humanity has been denigrated can no longer be denied we have to look at ways we can relate to both differently before it is too late. This is a serious theological reflection that encompasses all that is environmental and all that needs to be considered as part of the earth/cosmic community. Our sexual and spiritual lives are also embedded deeply in these reflections because of how our experiences in our spiritually embodied lives inform us of who we are in the world and the universe if nurtured healthily. Relationships and how we conduct them with ourselves others and other created beings is also paramount in this active theological discourse.



Figure 53 'Planet Earth - Our Blue Planet', panel 15, acrylic Megan Clay 2008

evolution to become the living breathing thinking conscious relational human beings we are today yet the memories of all that has taken place so far remains embedded in us. It would also be a while before we could see the Earth as the blue planet we now see from space.

The whole cooling process teemed, Swimme and Berry inform us, 'with multiple transformations and transitions before the first cellular life appeared, new beings emerged out of this multidimensional cauldron...life was finally evoked by a planet wide lightning storm stinging the ocean for millions of years.' The earth's struggle for sustainability in its early beginnings highlights a certain ignorance in most of humanities knowledge. Power struggles remain between men and women, sexuality, spirituality and unaccepted gender issues outside of the norm, rich and poor, class and race whilst unchecked consumerism of technology and other forms of materialism is now showing a profound effect on not only adult lives but also that of the child. This along with global capitalism that runs riot cutting in and destroying human beings livelihoods and dreams. Is it true what O'Murchu tells us then that 'The battered earth **cries out** for justice we respond thanks to ancestral grace',⁷⁶ I am not sure that there is enough relational consciousness in response that can save human beings when most of humanity is ashamed and afraid of their bodies? The capacity we as humans have for hearing cries of justice and peace, having love and compassion for one another often falls on stony ground and is replaced with greed and one's rights. The earth's wholeness and other parts of creation can survive without us but in revering this wholeness we too can perhaps become part of that wholeness/holiness. The question is are there enough of us to listen and be present enough to participate and make a difference? What are the possibilities for a growing relational consciousness?

Energetic Infusions, Entanglement and Quantum Stories of Incarnation

It is the relational consciousness that Hay and Nye⁷⁷ talk about in their observations of the child that reminds me of the energetic connections to this afore mentioned phenomenon, because this is also her story of energetic quantum infusion. It is interesting to note that the myth of the feminine still maintains its power that little girls are still considered as quiet receptive and passively objective as opposed to the boisterous nature of boys who are full of energy and mischief. This feeds into another story that began to evolve within me as I painted the mural for the cosmic walk. I felt the energy of these cosmic interconnections through reading this narrative that Swimme and Berry were telling in relation to my theological thinking and their science. These thoughts also developed out of many conversations as I painted these panels in a cupboard on the main university campus, born out of the questions

⁷⁶ O'Murchu, 2008, *op.cit.*, p.83

⁷⁷ Hay and Nye, *op.cit.*, p.11.

asked about what I was painting and why. The conversational topics were as wide as they were deep about politics, faith, science, religion, spirituality, sexuality, relationships, nature and often a combination of them all.

I was becoming increasingly aware of the reality of the cosmos' ability to transform this energy through each stage of its becoming just as our own sun does with its energy to give us life, to nurture and protect us but with the ability also to harm and eventually destroy us. Even in this paradoxical understanding energy is not lost but always transformed as Dr. Mason has informed us.⁷⁸ The story we are part of is one of creation as much as it is one of destruction, through violent cosmic explosions that bring death and resurrection and new life. We are the new life of the cosmos at a pivotal time in this story,⁷⁹ consciousness giving us choice on whether to co-operate or not with a story that needs our help to evolve. How do we engage in that process when there is so much distraction on so many levels?

I have taken time to tell this story as it has significance in terms of where we place the lives of children. Possibilities for change lie in being willing to embrace the open-endedness of a transformation of risk and uncertainty that quantum theology offers within creations evolutionary process which we cannot control but can only co-operate with if we choose. This is always a work in progress and process; it is not fixed and never complete but is always flowing. Relational consciousness that Hay and Nye suggest in their observation of children's spiritual lives needs to take a step further, in order that the child is nurtured towards a transformed future of fluidity not a fixed one. The complexities continue as boundaries betray us within the fixed ideas of human hierarchical control over nature and the way humankind subdues it. This has had a knock on effect in terms of how we see the female child because of the historic connection of the feminine with nature and the material which has been viewed as negative. It is a huge move from the perfect beginnings of Eden from which we fell and must be redeemed into new life. The consequences in the spiritual and sexual lives of women and men have been considered as our ensuing fallen state and all darkness must be removed from us if we are once again to regain our original perfection. For children this has meant strict training into the Christian life with stories of damnation helping to control them and more than anything it has meant a move away from the created order which was seen as playing such a large part in the ruin of original perfection. The story that Swimme and Berry place before us as a theological, not simply a scientific story offers so much more; here the chaotic darkness is the very stuff of an unfolding and energetic universe that moves in random balance as it brings forth new life. For now I would just like to imagine what this might mean for the

⁷⁸ Mason, *ibid.*

⁷⁹ Abrams and Primack, *op.cit.*, pp.79-81.

spiritual and sexual development of children if it does not place fixed outcomes in either realm but rather the excitement of endless glorious possibility.

The energy of the primordial flaring forth is our actual incarnational heritage and is a fully relational one. Our interconnection and interdependency is a reality and how we are and how we engage with the planet does matter. It is energy that has been abundantly given to us as a gift and how we receive, use and communicate this gift is crucial to the future unfolding of our story. I am in agreement with O'Murchu when he describes this energy 'as the connective tissue, from which we weave the entire tapestry of our evolutionary story',⁸⁰ and it is the thread with which to consciously begin to weave our future theological stories. Scientists are urging the global community to unite in a collective story that will take us into a more sustainable future. Will one story do for all? Experience tells me this is doubtful feminist theologies have been weaving many stories of experience for at least four decades now in their present form and as we unfold the diversity of human life alone the strands increase and the pattern becomes more complex. It is a hard task to grasp what this energy can mean to us in terms of life and futures when many of earth's inhabitants are struggling and on the edge of disaster in their own lives. Further as a feminist theologian I do have to be cautious of the one story suggestion and the possible disappearance of women in that story as she has disappeared in the 'mono' of Christianity and as a theologian I do have to ask if this tale of energy has any connection at all to my Christian heritage. I believe it does and it can be argued that this is the same energy and power of *dunamis* Heyward implies when she speaks of the erotic raw energy that is innate which is incarnational and divine, it is this power she says that enables us to become co-creators⁸¹ and 'God' each other and the earth which we cohabit with all other sentient beings that live interdependently alongside us and within us. The erotic power is an entanglement of our human sensual selves, an integrated sexual/spiritual union that comes with being alive and embodied, infused with this cosmic energy of the stars and beyond. Children are a huge part of this, these recently new creations energised and burning brightly like new formed stars awaiting transformation. I would also argue that they too are sensuous sexual/spiritual beings from the beginning of life in utero. They too have the capacity to walk divinely in a co-creative role and have much to teach adults whatever role they may play in the child's life. Relationship emerges as a two way process from the divine in utero with mother and all other relationships, even other sentient life and the earth as a living organism. The child has the ability to exchange knowledge, understanding, love and wisdom with all relationships in diverse ways given right relationship at the beginning of the child's developing

⁸⁰ O'Murchu, 2002, *op.cit.*, p.45.

⁸¹ Heyward, 1989, *op.cit.*, pp.188-190.

life. How these two way relationships progress from one relationship to another is important especially the one that takes the child into the school learning environment into the realm of being taught. All of this impacts on the child's energy which is integral to her sexual and spiritual life.

Recognising teaching and learning as a two way process is important for its incarnational value in relation to the openness to the creative flow of energy that opens up to Heyward's notion of a co-creative praxis. Body theologian Isherwood talks about the value of incarnational teaching in dialogue with the teacher she says

The passion behind this approach to teaching is openness to God/*divine* as revealed in this world in this moment...for the enfleshment of God/*divine* to be present in teacher pupil relationships...it requires listening to the students...suspend judgement because it diminishes a child...try to understand what you find hard to hear. There is much for you to learn through your interaction as a teacher with the student.⁸²

This process as suggested by Isherwood is relational, meaning making and has a transforming potential for both teacher and child and has a huge potential to become part of the story we tell.

We have a new understanding scientifically informed regarding the reality of the interdependence of all living things and Keller takes up the theological challenge by moving us ever deeper into an account of multiple, multi-layered complexities of becoming in her essay 'Be a Multiplicity'.⁸³ She brings to our attention the prophetic voice of Anne Conway the seventeenth century philosopher who describes how we are never one, rather each living thing host's infinite creatures in their existence, which I understand to mean that we are biospheres in ourselves, multiple in our being and becoming. If we were to have microscopic vision we would indeed see a world teeming with bio diversity⁸⁴ in places that only our imagination can surmise and science is beginning to tell us. Keller says 'Conway's vision of this irreducible multiplicity, even as she prophesies the unfathomable macro and micro scales of current physics, runs to theological'.⁸⁵ This takes us beyond three in relationship, causing the 'ménage a trois' within a Christian Trinitarian context to fade into a closed and exclusive system because we are so much more in relationship, more akin to Paul's statement of believers being all members of one body as we see in Corinthians 12:12. When we look outside the circumscribed structures of these truths, into the entanglement of multiple cosmic

⁸² Lisa Isherwood 'Incarnational Teaching', *Unpublished Lecture Notes*, 1999, pp.1-4.

⁸³ Catherine Keller 'Be A Multiplicity' in Catherine Keller and Laurel C Schneider, *op.cit.*, pp.81-101.

⁸⁴ Bacteria are the oldest living beings on earth and the have been around for 4 billion years. These are on the earth, on land in the water, in the soil and deep underground, even flying in the air, in the food we eat. They are living inside and outside every animal tree and plant and even living inside and outside of human beings on the skin and in our gut. www.gaia-movement.org [Accessed on 20th September 2012].

⁸⁵ Keller in Keller and Schnieder, *op.cit.*, p.82.

interconnections of being and becoming, relationality takes on a new meaning, shouting out loud the complexities and uncertainties that present themselves beyond the boxed truths of doctrine. Keller and Schneider in naming this new way of seeing and becoming as 'polydoxy,' assert that 'Divinity understood in terms of multiplicity, open-endedness, and relationality, now forms a matrix of revelation rather than a distortion, or evidence of its lack.'⁸⁶ Colleen Hartung describes it as that which accounts for 'a space of many opinions about belief within a body of belief, or alternatively a place of many faiths within a circle of faith, implies an openness to diversity, difference, challenge and multiplicity.'⁸⁷ This in itself looks beyond an assumed view of spiritual sexual lives and it would seem, is another way of opening up the arena for all embodied voices to speak, to be heard in their truth and reality and thus find empowerment. This perhaps moves us out of the dangerous realm of the one story that science often wishes to tell.

Science has given us a new and enlightened understanding about our physical world but 'Spirituality in this quantum universe enters the conversation eager to contribute and open to change'⁸⁸ entering us ever deeper into uncertainty, shaking the theological foundations in the surety of a contained male God and has sent the theologian out, as a nomadic cosmic traveller, seeking to understand the divine in a much bigger and less stable universe than was first thought. The new scientific twenty-first century discoveries have also pushed us into making new assessments in regard to our position within the future evolutionary process. Consequently for those of us, who are theologically inclined, spirituality has taken on new meaning when we see the interconnectedness that we have with this bigger picture of the cosmos. To be a citizen within a global/cosmic community challenges us to change, to realise that our human existence relies on the whole ecological community of planet earth and every evolutionary event that has occurred throughout the cosmos from that quantum moment, the 'big bang,'⁸⁹ to now. This reverses the Christian view and so requires new Christian thinking. Thomas Berry suggests one required change is to view ourselves cosmically as 'living in a communion of subjects rather than a collection of objects.'⁹⁰ While this is a mighty challenge on a cosmic scale it also opens the door for girl children to be seen as subjects rather than objects as they are used within society and itself offers a huge challenge to centuries of objectification. Today the Guardian newspaper tells us that

⁸⁶ *op.cit.*, p.1,

⁸⁷ Colleen Hartung 'Faith and Polydoxy in the Whirlwind' in Keller and Schneider, *op.cit.*, pp. 150-164.

⁸⁸ Winters, *op.cit.*, p.30.

⁸⁹ The 'Big Bang' was for a long time thought of by science as the theoretical beginnings of space time from nothing. However it has now what is thought of as a reality, not out of nothing, but something the latter of which remain both scientifically and theologically a 'mystery.'

⁹⁰ Berry *op.cit.*, p.125

As many as 45 children a day are at risk from rape violence and sexual exploitation at the hands of gangs who prey on their vulnerability, according to the biggest study carried out in England. Local authorities, police forces and health officials are ignoring the warning signs displayed by at risk teenagers, who are often seen as problematic or complicit in their own abuse...The inquiry into child exploitation in gangs and groups said the “shocking reality” in England was thousands of children were being exploited and raped in gangs and in organised “parties”, but many were falling through cracks in a system that was meant to protect failed them...The report found that 2,409 children had been exploited in a 14 month period from August 2010 to October 2011, but the real figure was probably “far greater” because of lack of data and confusion in reporting sexual exploitation...16,500 children were reported as being at high risk of sexual exploitation displaying behaviours such as running away from home drink and drug abuse, eating disorders and criminality. Unnamed government officials comments were recorded to have said that these accusations were half baked and crazy!!!⁹¹

Our interconnectedness shows that whatever actions we take or the ideology we think or speak in relation to the earth, each other and other life forms, will undoubtedly impact on the collective wellbeing of every-body in creation in either a negative or positive way. So consciously lived lives that are creative are central to seeing a way forward with a new world view. Being aware of diversity, rhythm and resonance within the bigger picture plays a huge part in how we relate. We are after all in the same cosmic story where atoms connect us in their bonded relationships; as the universe story tells us we are quantum beings in a quantum world situated in a quantum universe.⁹² Whether our prejudicial fear of difference gets the better of us or power relations dictate who we are to one another, ultimately we do not have control, rather we have choice and can choose to co-operate with the unfolding energetic flow in communion. We have to first understand this reality in connection with our embodiment and all of what that includes, in particular our sexuality and spirituality which holds both our strength and vulnerability. Making the cosmos our spiritual home enables the female child to enter her future on an equal footing thus re-connecting her to her birthright, *dunamis*, the quantum energy of the cosmos. This is because the quantum universe does not differentiate between genders as patriarchal structures have so rigorously done in order that they may reign on such a high pinnacle of power over nature, women and girls.

Pre-Christian Artefacts - Worshipping the Feminine in the Cosmos

The combination of science and religion has arguably been around longer than we might imagine although were obviously not named as such. If we look at symbols relating to the

⁹¹ www.guardian.co.uk/society/2012/nov/21/child-risk-sex-exploitation-gang?intcmp=239

⁹² Winter, *op.cit.*, p.28-9.

cosmos and the primordial worshipping of heavenly bodies like the sun and the planets that have evolved and transformed into the personified gods and goddesses of ancient Egypt⁹³ and



Figure 54 'Venus of Willendorf'. (ref. in footnotes p. 230).

This statue was discovered in 1908 and focuses on the largeness of her breasts, belly, vulva and thighs defining the fecundity of the female body.

later in classical Greece and Rome.⁹⁴ There is evidence to show that our primal ancestors for a long time found embodied spiritual meanings in the rituals⁹⁵ they performed in relation to their earth environment and the heavens of the outlying universe. This can be seen in the

⁹³ *op.cit.*, p.6.

⁹⁴ Micheal Jordan, *Gods of the Earth: the Quest for the Mother Goddess and the sacred King* (London: Transworld Publishers Ltd., 1992), pp.177-8,133.

⁹⁵ Carol Christ *Rebirth Of The Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality* (New York: Routledge, 1997),p.42.

visual art of cave paintings⁹⁶ and artefacts such as goddess statues displayed large breast abdomen and vulvas or spiral galactic symbols were found deeply carved into these earthen effigies, seen in Figures 54 and 55 below.⁹⁷ When these artefacts were discovered scholars believe them to be honouring and celebrating female fecundity⁹⁸ as the core of life. We also see animal and plant life integrated into this same divine human celebration. Both the celebration of the female and animal and plant life seems far removed from our western religious notions. The way they related to the earth is translated through these artefacts. This is one of the connections that we need to reclaim and maintain as we uncover the past because it shows the interconnection of past evolving lives with both the earth and the cosmos.

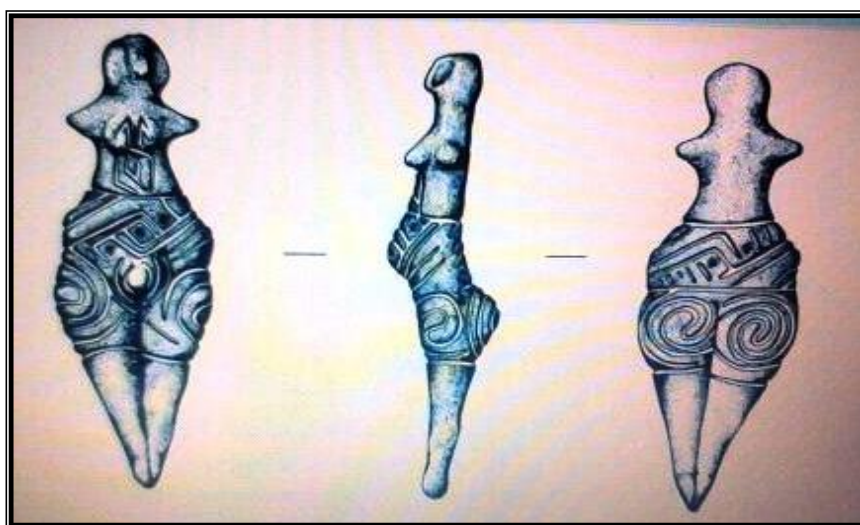


Figure 55 'Vinca Culture, c 5000BC', Maria Gimbutas *The Language of the Goddess*

(ref. in footnotes).

Carvings on this figurine are centred around the breasts, abdomen, vulva, buttocks and thighs. The symbolic combination of semi circles enhancing the oval vulva, the meander and spirals that decorate the thighs and buttocks conveys dynamism growing, flowing and turning thus showing the centre of female power and fecund creativity. The Goddess embodied the mystery of new life.

Our ancient ancestors would have had a more intense cosmic vista than ours. Because light pollution was not a factor, the relationship they had with it would have been different

⁹⁶ Ibid. pp.50-1. See also Cave Paintings carbon dated 32,000 years shown on DVD 'Cave of Forgotten Dreams' Director Werner Herzog March 25th 2011. www.caveofforgottendreams.co.uk

⁹⁷ 'Venus of Willendorf' c. 24,000-22,000 BCE Oolithic limestone 43/8 inches (11.1 cm) high, Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna. Also see Marijas Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper Row, 1989).

⁹⁸ Christ, *op.cit.*, p.91

because of their more embodied⁹⁹ sensually fluid and intuitive disposition. Their heightened senses enabled them to engage more fully with their environment. The cycles of the seasons would have been marked and celebrated and one can imagine that the power behind nature would have left our ancestors in fear and awe, life would have been dependent on how they fitted in with the earth's rhythms and to how they adapted their lives around them. The seasons are changing and so have our ideas about what is natural and nature, our understanding of connection need to be re-imaged in relation to our environment. A more intimate connection with the seasons and nature and the heavens¹⁰⁰ are crucial to those of female children because of the intimate connection they have with their own bodies and cycles that need to be included positively¹⁰¹ in relation to the cosmic/ human/divine story one that links to their sexual /spiritual lives now.

Art in its many forms is as important to telling the story as the word within our spoken language, just as cave paintings and artefacts were in our ancient ancestor's time. They reflected people's thoughts, ideas, visions, dreams and the environment in which they lived just as visual art does today. In my art work I have illustrated what has been written on the female child's body and engaged with the spiritual/energised adult female body in relation to the cosmic story. Artefacts and visual images from the primal age hold their own language¹⁰² and the power to connect the observer in an intuitive sensual way with the religio-cultural past. Lack of the written word does not make these images valueless rather they create a story that honours the female as well as animal and plant life and provide a platform for the re-membering of a more holistic spirituality.

Adrienne Rich shows the importance of this re-membering within her poetry, which she says allows us a new way of conventionalising woman,

She is beautiful in ways we have almost forgotten, or which have become defined as ugliness, her body possesses mass, interior depth, inner rest and balance. She is not smiling, her expression is inward-looking or ecstatic and sometimes her eyeballs seem to burn through air...she is not particularly

⁹⁹ O'Murchu, 2002, *op.cit.*, pp.16-7.

¹⁰⁰ The Mayan people created wonderful works of art see <http://www.worldmuseumofman.org/mayan2.php> [Accessed on 30th October 2012].

¹⁰¹ There are growing concerns about female children and how they see their bodies' girls as young as 5 now routinely worry about their weight and appearance...Rosi Prescott Chief executive of the YWCA says it is clear that there is something wrong when girls of this age are worrying about appearance based on messages they are seeing all around them. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2012/may/30/girls-aged-five-worried-about-body-image> [Accessed 12th February 2012]. I would further like to add that this is not a new phenomenon girls have been affected in this way for at least the last two decades reports have come and gone and suddenly we are shocked I think this is another case of episodic amnesia. For the last two Millennia of Christianity the female body has been the site of abhorrence and rejection why are we so surprised?

¹⁰² Christ, *op.cit.*, p.55.

young, or rather she is absolutely without age...She exists, not to cajole man, but to assert herself¹⁰³

To be assertive is sometimes conceived as aggressive or trouble-making in women or girls rather this is a myth, assertiveness needs to be respected and nurtured from an early age¹⁰⁴ in girls as part of their sexual/spiritual unfolding and becoming.

So it is possible to remember a time before mastery over nature and women. Eco-philosopher Valerie Plumwood uses the term 'Mastery' in relation to women and nature saying,

Much feminist theory has detected a masculine presence in the officially gender-neutral concept of reason. In contrast my account suggests that it is not masculine identity pure and simple, but multiple, complex cultural identity of the master framed in the context of class, race, species and gender domination which is at issue. This cultural identity has framed the dominant concept of western thought, especially those of reason and nature.¹⁰⁵

Plumwood suggests that mastery creates interconnecting forms of domination through gender, race, ethnicity, sex and species-ism which are so embedded in cultures that they are considered to be natural. Therefore remembering a time prior to mastery of nature and women is a crucial step towards the liberation of both and if this is also linked to the cosmic unfolding itself an exciting re-remembering may come into play.

In our re-remembering we need to be mindful of Ruether's cautious note regarding matriarchal societies when she pointed out that they could have been as unequal as patriarchal ones and laid the foundations of the legacy of male resentment which we may be feeling today.¹⁰⁶ Despite this caution she says that we have to take note of our primal ancestors in order to structure new forms of gender parity,¹⁰⁷ one that demonstrates mutual relationship in the rearing of our children.

In our storytelling we need stories that can encompass all of creation including human diversity, storytelling, through image, sound, song and word, having always been a way to hand down information from generation to generation'.¹⁰⁸ These early visual stories I would argue show that our human ancestors were aware of their interconnectedness with nature through the symbolism of the feminine because of women's obvious creative ability of giving birth. However this is not the only way women contribute to life. Even Swimme and Berry's analogy to the feminine birthing process of space and time in the universe's beginnings and its

¹⁰³ Rich, *op.cit.*, p.60-7.

¹⁰⁴ Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (Boston: Beacon Press. 1988), p.119.

¹⁰⁵ Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London, New York: Routledge, 1993), p.3.

¹⁰⁶ Rosemary Radford Ruether, 1992, *op.cit.*, p.171.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ O'Murchu, *op.cit.*, p.44.

ongoing unfolding at every transformation echoes and lends itself to this truth of her embodiment.¹⁰⁹ The spiral symbols found within these ancient cultures hold the meaning of infinity and had been used prolifically through visual art, sculptures and ceramics.¹¹⁰ Spirals correlating with DNA may be a scientific discovery but Richard Grossinger points out that 'a double twining serpent or paired helix has been an insignia inside us since the dawn of consciousness.'¹¹¹ He is then perhaps suggesting what I am hinting at which is that humans have a deep connection with all that is and often at an unconscious level it is given form and shape.

Theological and Scientific Incarnations, Movement and Breath

Mae-Wan Ho calls for scientific boundaries to become more permeable realising the complexity of bio-diversity and the interconnective value of our indigenous ancestry, she says that there is a

need to recover a way of knowing in science that involves the complete participation of the knowing being: intellect and feeling, mind and body, spirit and intuition. Authentic science and art are both creative activities arising out of this total engagement of nature and reality.¹¹²

I would suggest that within the intricate borders of biophysics and particle physics the frontier of incarnational potential needs to be crossed and explored to open up new embodied ways of living that encompasses life in abundance as outlined in Isherwood's spiralling incarnation.¹¹³ But what are we spiralling out of and into? This is an important point if we are going to tell stories that incorporate an understanding of an embodied spirituality that transforms, amidst these complexities of being. Incarnation is not just about filling an empty space rather it is all that is encompassed in an enfleshed body that lives life in fullness, a body that acknowledges its lived existence fully conscious in relation to other bodies of life around it. A body which has feeling, empathy, awe, wonder, emotion, passion, creative potential and love in mutual relationship, but equally has a paradoxical awareness of its own anger, pain, grief, loss, sickness, destructive potential and death. Incarnation Isherwood tells us, is placing theological praxis within the body of women in order to claim their dignity, equality and humanity.¹¹⁴ This is an equality that will include them in all areas of decision making for the planets future and that of the female child. This incarnational existence is situated in the experience of all human

¹⁰⁹ Swimme and Berry, *op.cit.*, pp.1-80.

¹¹⁰ There seems to be an uninformed connection, an incoherent knowledge in the use of this symbol within the advertising world it has become lost in translation. Unless the power of the symbolic for all subjects can be remembered and re-claimed, then the power and meaning of this sacred symbol will not be realised fully.

¹¹¹ Grossinger, *op.cit.*, p.386.

¹¹² Ho, *op.cit.*, pp.11-12.

¹¹³ Isherwood in Clack *op.cit.*, p.140.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

life, at whatever age and also includes every other sentient life form made in the image of God/The Divine if all of creation is seen as being of and in God (Genesis 1:27-31).

The sciences new incarnational story embeds us in the cosmos and declares our deep interconnectedness and it could be argued that this deep connection is where our intuitive knowledge¹¹⁵ comes from. June Boyce-Tillman looks for unconventional wisdom which is hidden and buried within the intuitive bodies of human beings and I would say especially the feminine. Tillman addresses the need to uncover these buried ways of knowing this 'subjugated knowledge'¹¹⁶ which is crucial to our well-being. The burial ground of these ways of knowing is sited in the body itself where intuitive knowing is buried under bodies of knowledge organised around mechanistic ways of thinking. This actually affects our mental health and general well-being¹¹⁷ and disrupts the creative flow of energy that has the power to transform and change how we see, think and act. For the female child the acknowledgement of these ways of knowing is crucial since it is this unconventional way that is found in women that has often been used as evidence against her sanity or fitness for life in the public domain.

The quantum universe story tells us that every part of the evolutionary process from the big bang makes us who we are as humans along with the non-human animate and inanimate.¹¹⁸ Biophysicist Richard Grossinger describes our incarnational becoming within the developing process of the foetus in utero he reminds us that everything begins from the inside and spirals out

Brine of nucleic seeds, we bud at a sub molecular level from transmutation of metals, at a cellular level from agglutinations of molecules, in the cosmos at large from dissolution of hydrogen gauze through itself. The fetus the womb passes through all these guises on route to body-mind. In Embryonic cloaks we travel deep and dark as celebrants approaching a fair on foot. Getting closer (more membranes), we begin to hear the collective din. Closer yet (neurons synapsing), we discern separate shouts and musicians' songs.

'Then we are among them'¹¹⁹

Becoming he says is a 'transformative process which takes the self-organising embryo through multiple dimensions, at least four, as an internal transition not an external one...that sew us into our bodies...we do not enter from outside, we create context solely by our becoming'.¹²⁰ Our becoming it could be argued also depends on our environment and how that affects us in

¹¹⁵ 'Sophia Wisdom' is a feminist Christological image that depicts the internal and external worlds of interconnection with the cosmos there is no separation between the two. The symbolism within the painting represents the intuitive knowledge of that female cosmic interconnectedness.

¹¹⁶ Boyce-Tillman, *op.cit.*, Ch.1 pp.9-38.

¹¹⁷ *op.cit.*, p.187-8.

¹¹⁸ Abrams and Primack, *op.cit.*, p.6.

¹¹⁹ Grossinger, *op.cit.*, p.386.

¹²⁰ *op.cit.*, p.387.

complex ways in relation to our emotional/psychical development. The female emotional/psychical development has been deeply affected by Christian doctrine which has been forced upon the bodies of women for Two Thousand years. Evolution has marked these changes on the body of both men and women. If we are to note the dynamic reality of biophysics within a cosmic frame of reference then we have to cast off those narrow female definitions that Christian doctrine has fixed along with its metaphysical delusions of sexual spiritual lives of its followers and the lives of secular society which it has hugely influenced. Surely this is a more liberating starting point than the fallen daughter of Eve?

Linda Hartley who works in somatic psychology through movement therapy reminds us that our bodies remember through every stage of incarnational transition even cosmically. If we take seriously our cosmic beginnings as told by scientists then this is a lived reality and something that we could possibly become conscious of through the creative practices that are available to us. I would argue, this consciousness cannot be limited to human beings because all living things have the ability deep within their cellular memory to remember how to be and what to do, to survive to celebrate life, she says that

... we can begin to see who we can truly be, beyond conditioned self-images and habitual patterns of thinking, moving and living...All that lives has the ability to move based on some personal motivation, whether conscious or unconscious, organic, instinctual, or volitional. Even a plant, as it grows, adapts its shape so as to be touched by the light of the sun. Movement in its variety of forms is an expression of life and is essential to the continuation of life...¹²¹.

Consciousness and memory are held even deeper and 'delocalised throughout the liquid crystalline continuum of the body, not only in the brain and heart but at cellular level through the connective tissue'¹²² in humans, but as a conscious awareness this includes the cells of every living thing; the very nature of sensual movement brings these memories and awareness to life. Hartley rightly points out this does not pertain only to human life. She reminds us that we are deeply connected to the cyclical motion of nature in its many phases, in

...rest and renewal exists everywhere within us, from life of our cells to the flow of our breath to our daily lives, when we sleep it connects us deeply to the earth and other life forms...connecting to the wisdom of the body is important. To be present in our body is a form of awareness...In coming into our body we become connected to our greater home, the earth, we become part of the earth and she becomes part of us. By being present in our bodies we are grounded in the earth and are then able to express the earth's qualities through our being present to her.¹²³

¹²¹ Hartley, 1995, *op.cit.*, p.xix.

¹²² Ho, *op.cit.*, p.229.

¹²³ Hartley, 1995, *op.cit.*, pp. xx-xxi.

All life on earth moves within the rhythm of the whole which reminds me of the imaginative prophetic writer of (Isaiah 55: 12) who declares '...the mountains before you will break into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands,' I do not see this as a personification of inanimate objects but as a celebration of incarnational subjects, that are full of the energy of the cosmos. Trees also provide us with the very breath we breathe they are the oxygen-aters of our biosphere. We take these sentient giant beings for granted but without them and other life forms like bees and insects that pollinate we wouldn't be here.

Breathing is not only an obvious act of being alive but one we take for granted. Hartley talks about it in terms of the body's wisdom becoming alive to ourselves consciously. Breath is important to every level of our being. The breath we breathe through our lungs oxygenates our bodies and keeps us alive but cells have their own breathing rhythm. Hartley says

When the cells are breathing fully there is a constant supply of energy to and an elimination of toxic waste to each cell This happens through the porous skin or membrane of the cell. With this inflow and outflow each cell continually expands and contracts slightly, in its own rhythm, independent of the rhythm of external respiration taking place through the lungs. This breathing activity of the cells is called "internal respiration," or cellular breathing...Cellular breathing is the movement pattern that integrates the whole physical body. This state is one that may also be experienced in meditative practice.¹²⁴

If Hartley is right then Irigaray's suggestion that 'women need to connect to their divinity through breath as a spiritual exercise is an autonomous gesture *par excellence*-necessary-to the cultivation of a divinity that would sanctify the body and all physical reality,¹²⁵ then could be seen as a way of reintegrating western dualisms that have been put on female bodies. This theme that connects breath to the divine continues with '*Ruach-ha kodesh*'¹²⁶ the spirit of God, the in-coming and the outgoing of the Holy Spirit that is likened to the wind in the book of Acts 2:2, at Pentecost and in John 3:8 the wind that blows where it/*she*¹²⁷ wills,¹²⁸ the breath of God that flows within us and also between us.

¹²⁴ *op.cit.*, p.10.

¹²⁵ Luce Irigaray in Joy Morny, Kathleen O'Grady and Judith. L. Poxon (eds.), *French Feminists on Religion: A Reader* (London, New York: Routledge, 2002), p.13.

¹²⁶ Long, *op.cit.*, p.177.

¹²⁷ I speak of the Holy Spirit in the feminine here Ruach, like 'Shekinah' is the female part of God; Sophia Wisdom that Long talks about . *op.cit.*, p. 55.

Artists through various mediums, poets and writers alike have feminised the Holy Spirit one example that comes immediately to mind is Frana Favata a sculptor from Plymouth in Devon, who says – "I decided to create two men and a woman. The father is seen as holding, the son receiving and the spirit of the female, as giving." Commissioned by the Bishop of Exeter and his wife, this work is in the Palace Gardens, Exeter, Devon. The concept of this commission comes from our need for others, our desire for communication and our hope for support. Sculpted from Beer Stone - weighing 3 tons each <http://www.favatasculpture.com/t1.html> [Accessed 15th June 2012].

¹²⁸ In addition to the image of "breath," the New Testament also gives us another image for what the Holy Spirit is... The New Testament says that the Holy Spirit is like the wind. When Jesus' disciples

But where do we place God or the divine in this new cosmology in a way that is not just nebulous and where do we find spiritual meaning if the theological foundations have been shaken? Can we continue to use the name of God when we consider what monotheism has created for gendered lives trapping masculinities into a limited frame of reference thus creating multiple layers of oppression for women and restricting the flow of unfolding lives? Do we have to move beyond monotheism or even God? Kristeva clearly marks the problem of a polarisation of the sexes within a monotheistic unity in the west and the betrayal of women who are seen as opposites of the “other race’ ...*the problem goes ever deeper looking at societies own ‘naiveté if one considers our own modern societies to be simply patrilineal...capitalist-monopolist, and ignores the fact that they are at the same time...governed by...monotheism’.*¹²⁹ (*my italics*). My question about God remains in the balance and it is not just relevant to me as I see a huge struggle in people of faith trying to find another way to name the divine power that they experience, a power that has been limited to a male authority deeply embedded in the stories we still tell. This to me is a valid question but not new. Schneider gives us an alternative metaphysical God/divinity, one that bypasses a fixed external whose spirit/energy only infuses the ‘one’. This is a metaphysical monotheistic power that is paradoxical. One that does not dominate but is free flowing in its fluidity and has multiple possibilities of multiple becoming, infusing everything in creation as it flows in out and in-between all who are open to its transformative power.¹³⁰ Schneider challenges monotheism in order to find a new way to look at divinity. As she says so poignantly of traditional theologians

It is as if theologians forget monotheism is a metaphor just like all other concepts and images of the divine. Perhaps this comes from too much at stake in the logic of the One. Too many doctrines have been formulated on the basis of this logic, too many wars have been fought in the name of the One God...There is a great deal at stake for Christian theology in the constellation of doctrines and theological structures that are built on the logic of the one.¹³¹

And so much of humanity including women and children and all that lives on the earth as we know have suffered under the logic of the one.

experienced the Spirit on Pentecost, they heard a sound like a great wind. There is another time in the Gospel of John 3:8 when Jesus is speaking to Nicodemus and likens the Holy Spirit to the wind: he says it blows wherever it wants to, you can’t control it or know where it’s going to blow next.

¹²⁹ Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, Anita Barrows (trans.) (New York: M. Boyars, 1974), pp.19-22.

¹³⁰ Schnieder is not quite ready to be rid of monotheism because it has both been the cause of pain through power over authority and the joy of meaning making in its stories and faith that make up God. Laurel C. Schneider, *Beyond Monotheism: A Theology of Multiplicity* (London, New York: Routledge, 2008).

pp.107-28.

¹³¹ *op.cit.*, p.189.

In the twenty - first century scientists hurry on in their excitement about verifications of super-massive Black Holes at the centres of galaxies;¹³² the developing theories of 'Worm Holes'¹³³ and possibilities of the 'Multiverse.'¹³⁴ Their search for God within the experimental project (CERN), which is a large part of scientific research today in different particles within astrophysics globally, is now over.¹³⁵ The missing 'God Particle', 'Higgs Boson,' theorised by Professor Peter Higgs fifty years ago this year (2012) celebrates its official discovery and the beginning of more investigations to see what its role and purpose is. When they televised their discovery, the only female, the leading coordinator of CERN, experimental physicist Fabiola Gianotti was reported to have been the only one to have said 'Thank you to nature'.¹³⁶ But what does this missing 'God particle' mean in terms of our story and does it help girls? How do we incorporate it within our storytelling? Is God or the divine just a missing particle? We have seen how the classic monotheism has had a detrimental effect in the lives of girls and women and I am not convinced that simply transferring this 'mono' culture to a particle that is the glue of all that is will necessarily help women and girls in their striving for liberated lives. As a feminist and in the light of Schneider's critique I remain sceptical of any 'mono' logic be it scientific or theological- we do not wish to replace the God who may be disbelieved with science that may not.

Science has much to tell us as particle physicist Brian Cox¹³⁷ demonstrates through discoveries brought about by utilizing the Hubble Telescope.¹³⁸ 'The story of the messengers of light the stars reflected back to us through the telescope'¹³⁹ is as much a part of the story as quantum energy is. Cox says that these images showed three dimensional images of deep space time of galaxies, some nearby, perhaps a billion years old. The fuzzy red blobs not quite in focus are caught in the Hubble's reflective mirror and stretch back to twelve-billion years,

¹³² Swimme and Berry, *op.cit.*, pp 173-200. See also Stephen Hawkins, *A Brief History In Time: From The Big Bang to Black Holes* (London, New York: Bantam Press, 1988).

¹³³ Gribbin, *op.cit.*, p.83. Greene, *op.cit.*, pp.264-5.

¹³⁴ Gribbin, *op.cit.*, pp.62-88 and Greene, *op.cit.*, pp.366-70

¹³⁵ The Large Hadron Collider [LHC]. Built beneath the Swiss/French border at Geneva, the mammoth collider extends more than 16.5m in a circular tunnel - a complex system which took a decade to build. Since its initiation in 2008, the collider has encountered a number of technical problems, but physicists captured a hint of the boson's existence late last year, although more data was needed for confirmation. Now they have it.

In essence the Large Hadron Collider was built to create the ideal conditions to produce evidence of the Higgs Boson. The collider contains 1200 magnets cooled to -271C, which accelerate protons to 99.9% of the speed of light. At this speed the protons then 'collide', creating thousands of new particles.

Physicists believe that for every billion collisions 10 Higgs Bosons are created, although it is a fine art to measure. Particle physics has an accepted definition for a discovery: a "five-sigma" (or five standard-deviation) level of certainty which is the confirmation needed for this theoretical reality <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-18702455> 4.7.2012 [Accessed 4th July 2012].

¹³⁶ *op.cit.*, pp. 1-6.

¹³⁷ Brian Cox is a UK member part of ATLAS which is part of the research team of the Large Hadron Collider in Switzerland.

¹³⁸ The Hubble Telescope was launched in 1990.

¹³⁹ Cox, *op.cit.*, pp.16-75.

where the earliest galaxies were formed. This is what visually informs the story of our universe. The most distant galaxy recorded in 2010¹⁴⁰ was over thirteen-billion light years away, just over half a billion years after the beginning of the universe. Cox explains

The image of this ancient galaxy was created by a handful of photons of light; when they began their journey, released from hot primordial stars, there was no earth or sun and only an embryonic and chaotic mass of young stars and dust that would one day evolve into the Milky Way. When these little particles of light had completed almost two-thirds of their journey to Hubble's cameras, a swirling cloud of interstellar dust collapsed to form our solar system.¹⁴¹

Light is crucial to our cosmic story and has also been seen as significant to the Christian story. Stars enable us to see through the dark of space and help create the story that we humans are part of. However this cannot be the whole story because it is also a story of energy, movement, consciousness, imagination and mystery. We have to be mindful of the way we tell these stories to our children. This story that speaks of bleakness cold dark vacuous space and the death of these messengers the stars... 'a trillion, trillion years away', is not comforting and cannot be that absolute in a universe that has created consciousness.¹⁴² Our story has to be one of life hope and future which we cannot know absolutely and that we can co-create.¹⁴³ For a child to hear this story can be frightening in light of this reality, Abrams and Primack remind us that 'the stories of climate chaos, extinction of species and other looming problems can be terrifying'.¹⁴⁴ But equally so can other stories that they have been told to them within a Christian theological context such as tales of terror as mentioned in section two. The cosmological story has to be one that can feed the theological imagination, stimulate humanities creativity and hold a sustainable scientific reality in the present.

Quantum energy and its movement throughout the cosmos and us, moves within fields operating within a wider unified field. Its relevance here is to highlight any tendency to classify girls as a single subject group when in fact there are multiple groups which reflect the complexity of human diversity. I am arguing that the different behaviours, thoughts and actions of these groups will have an effect on the whole as well as the way they are treated by others in the wider field. Rupert Sheldrake writes

according to modern physics, fields are more fundamental than matter. Fields cannot be explained in terms of matter. Rather matter is explained in terms of energy within fields... According to the hypothesis of formative causation, morphic resonance occurs between such rhythmic structures of activity on the basis of similarity and through this resonance past patterns of

¹⁴⁰ *op.cit.*, p.55.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*

¹⁴² *op.cit.*, p.229.

¹⁴³ *op.cit.*, p.228.

¹⁴⁴ Abrams and Primack, *op.cit.*, p.161.

activity influence the fields of subsequent similar systems. Morphic resonance involves a kind of action at a distance in both space and time.¹⁴⁵

The picture is bigger and more complex than we can consciously think and understand if we can grasp what Sheldrake is describing when, 'Energy flows both within the field and the matter that is formed; the field is the space that holds memory, information and habits formed by them.'¹⁴⁶ It is possible then that girlhoods are multiple subject groups within the field, all with different resonating energy patterns of behaviour that are habitually formed and maintained. It could be argued then that these groups can be recognized as multiple fields of energy within diverse locations of experience. Further arguing that these ways of being create multiple realities competing with one another amongst various prejudices which will have an effect on the planet as a whole, because of how we think and act in relationship with one another in the spatiotemporal realm. Therefore because of the bonded relationships within the subatomic level of quantum space, which is everywhere, everything will be affected interrelationally. So if one person suffers all do and if one girl child suffers¹⁴⁷ all will at a vibrational level that resonates within the whole, realising a much bigger problem than was first thought. Judy Cannato suggests that it is in realising 'we are all interconnected within the morphic resonance of vibrational fields of energy that the possibilities for change are open to us. This is the time that we can consciously engage in creating a field of compassion for one another.'¹⁴⁸ Understanding morphic resonance in this way Cannato suggests that: 'We have the capacity to make choices that will evolve us, both personally and as a species.'¹⁴⁹ This is part of the process of spiritual transformation and transcendence. How we use this gift of energy is crucial and the implications globally are huge in terms of difference and suffering, we have to tread mindfully because all humanity has a part to play and not all are conscious or engaged at the same level. This is the territory that the female child's sexual and spiritual life is located in. Location becomes a complex issue when we think about some of the female child positions globally and culturally. For instance at a fundamental survival level in China where the life of the female child continues to hang in the balance we see that

China's One Child Policy has led to the deaths of tens of millions of girls, simply because of their gender. Due to existing cultural preferences for sons rather than daughters, many Chinese families are abandoning,

¹⁴⁵ Rupert Sheldrake, *The Presence of the Past: Morphic Resonance and the Habits of Nature* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p.109.

¹⁴⁶ *op.cit.*, xvii.

¹⁴⁷ The feminist statement is that while one woman suffers all suffer, if we think about this in terms of fields of resonance it couldn't be any closer to a truth for all humanity.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Chrissie Marchese, Alison Hoffman, Evan Davis, Megan Ryan, Jessica Dahl and Andrew Brown, (Cause Leaders), Documentary, *It's a Girl - End Gendercide Now* [Accessed on 15th November 2012].

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*

aborting, or hiding their female children. As a result, there are now 37 million more men than women living in China. This gender imbalance has in turn led to an increase in sex trafficking, child brides, and prostitution in the country.¹⁵⁰

This is not the only country that treats the female child in this way, in India the female child is equally at risk of being devalued, there is an: 'ongoing female gendercide in India which has killed about fifty million women in the country in three generations through practices like infanticide, feticide, deliberate starvation and neglect of girl under six years, dowry murders, bride 'trafficking,' 'honour' killings, and 'witch' hunts'.¹⁵¹

Other locations of girlhood are the relationships of girls in social and educational groups and how they act and see themselves and others in their group creating hierarchical position, fragmentation and exclusion whilst redefining their own girlhoods. Dawn H. Currie, Deidre M. Kelly and Shauna Pomerantz's research show complex lives of girlhoods that alter previous adult ideologies of passivity and innocence about them

Understanding "Selfhood" as a social project is a central task of "*girl power*"... "Selfhood" refers to a culturally and historically specific form of social identity; it captures the meaning that our social presence has for us and for others...not all identity practices by female adolescents earn membership in socially recognised girlhood....those labelled by classmates as "slut", "butch" or "lesbian" are positioned outside normative girlhood.¹⁵²

This reminds me of other excluded identities like transgendered, poverty, disabled, race and so on. The results of the interviews in this research highlight the complexities of what we think we know about girlhood, reinforced by remembering our own and recognising the reality that it is as individuals that we experience girlhood.

Faith communities bring their own difficulties into the mix of personal experience of the growing awareness of self, religious belief and intergenerational problems. Enabling girls to find their voice, to speak about how they feel and talk about their lives is encouraged by Grinko Baker who highlights the need for the support of older women in the academic field of a certain class

'White feminists' frequently forget to turn an intentional eye toward feminist socialisation of younger generations...Perhaps as the language of academia isolates them in towers ever-closer to the pinnacles of white male power, they have forgotten the painful memories of their own adolescence and can no longer speak the language or feel the pain of a teenage girl.¹⁵³

This might also be applied to the interaction between women and pre-adolescent girls.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*

¹⁵² Dawn H. Currie, Kelly, Deidre M. Kelly and Shauna Pomerantz, *Girl Power: Girls Reinventing Girlhood* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2009), p.2.

¹⁵³ Baker, *op.cit.*, p.15.

Girl-friendly theology can be a space for raising consciousness to another level where girls can realise their contributory value theologically, socially, personally and politically. This can be a space of empowerment and revolution which can not only change the world in which we live but also their own lives. Girls who enter into the realm of the Church also experience 'domination and competition from other women'.¹⁵⁴ Anne Phillips looks at girls within faith communities and how whole church communities treat girls saying that: 'The Church takes little account of gender difference, or knowledge of these gendered lives, especially in dealing with children. In biblical hermeneutics and in theology, girls are largely ignored, often assumed to be included in non-gendered specific references to 'children', which are not neutral'.¹⁵⁵

In the UK the experiences of secular girlhood will infiltrate all of the above groups because of the market place of technology and consumerism within the fashion world

in 2007 7-11 year old girls up and down the UK were recruited by Dubit on behalf of Mattel to market the Barbie Girl MP3 player...Every weekend, a range of children from seven and up report back what is in and what is out to companies...children are wonderful salespeople and conduits to other children...For girls, fashion products are all about attitude-being cute and sexy. 'I'm cool I'm hot, I'm everything you're not', 'I'm cute and neat, I'm your biggest treat', Too many boys too little time', sex kitten and flirt are all slogans from toys and T-shirts for girls as young as 6 years old,¹⁵⁶

There seems to be no escape from thousands of marketing distractions.

Another group of young girls are targeted by consumer industries in the form of beauty pageants and it could be argued that in terms of the field theory their girlhoods and sexual spiritual lives are affected.

They parade in miniature ball gowns, wear false eyelashes and can be seen as young as five...The child beauty pageant in the UK has seen a recent explosion in popularity. Although such contests are common in America, where they have spawned a multi-million dollar industry they are a relatively new import to this side of the Atlantic. But in Britain recently enamoured with the instant fame of reality television stars and image conscious glamour models demand for child beauty contests have risen exponentially.¹⁵⁷

I would argue here that it is the needs of parents that are being fulfilled through the child. It is a drive that wants to compete and win projected onto the child which will have an impact on the child's life. When Amber a seven year old was interviewed, she was asked if she would be entering anymore pageants after the present one, she answered, 'I don't know if mummy

¹⁵⁴ Phillips, *op.cit.*, Ch.8. pp.139-62.

¹⁵⁵ *op.cit.*, p.5.

¹⁵⁶ Mayo and Nairn, *op.cit.*, pp.xiv,57.

¹⁵⁷ Elisabeth Day, 'Living dolls: inside the world of child beauty pageants', *The Sunday Observer*, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2010/jul/11/child-beauty-queens/> [Accessed on 11th July 2010].

wants me to.¹⁵⁸ 'Amber most of all likes to collect stones, which she proceeded to proudly show the interviewer, "This is my red collection," carefully lifting out a series of rust- coloured stones from a box. She lays them in a line on the carpet and looks at them proudly,¹⁵⁹ demonstrating where her own desire lies. I would argue that these are the worlds in which female pleasure and desire is hidden from sight and sometimes lost and it is time to reclaim them. These girlhoods and the many that are not mentioned, explode into different realities according to different levels of experience making the unified field a busy conflicting space. Gathering different interdisciplinary research is a crucial part to how we sustain ourselves in this global crisis and there is already a spring of resources available that can make a valuable contribution to our human story and can alter our course from a destructive one to creative sustainable one but it has to begin now.¹⁶⁰

What then of our mythical stories, the stories that are deeply embedded in what holds religious faith together and fixes us in a time warp. God created the earth,¹⁶¹ 'Creation out of *'ex nihilo'* is how the Christian interpretation of the story goes with regard to the first verse of the Hebrew scripture of Genesis 1:1. In Genesis 1:2 Adam and Eve are the first and the last of God's creation made in 'his' image, to rule over all creation from the residency of the Garden of Eden; the home of the *'good children'*¹⁶² of God. This is until Eve is tempted by the serpent¹⁶³/Satan to eat from the tree of knowledge, which she then offers to Adam, thus in this action, she alone, is responsible for the fall of mankind and both are banished from paradise which proves to have devastating consequences on creation.¹⁶⁴

So this is the Christian myth in which only God alone can end what he alone started out of nothing. In the world of science earlier conventional theorists had spoken of the quantum moment, the origin of the universe as the big bang and its end as the big crunch the ultimate cosmic compression, the cosmos ending what it started.¹⁶⁵ Brian Cox reminds us that

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ See Abrams and Primack *op.cit.*, pp.79-89; Swimme and Berry, *op.cit.*, pp.241-261.

¹⁶¹ Panel 15 'Planet Earth' not only looks at the earth's part in the creation of the universe but reflects the creation of the earth from the Christian narrative that took seven days to create, approx., 5,000 to 6,000 years ago. This story is now an obsolete to many but holds meaning still to others who cannot accept evolution as a scientific reality.

¹⁶² I have already discovered in the endless treaties written by several of the early Church Fathers, in section two: their ideology of childhood and childlike qualities of the child were of innocence and sexual purity drawn in a paradigmatic way for the adult child of God.

¹⁶³ The serpent is another mythical embodiment of the Goddess of creation but has been manipulated by Christianity to represent the Devil, The morning star the beast in the apocalyptic stories in revelation.

¹⁶⁴ Thus begins the story of blame on the whole of woman-kind which then becomes a fatal legacy for the girl child. Dreams, desire and inclusive potential within the metanarrative appear conclusive to invisibility and erasure. The consequences are devastating because the earth its resources and all its sentient inhabitants are exploited and used for capital gain taking us away from what really matters to a life of abundance in exchange for a future of unsustainability.

¹⁶⁵ Greene, *op.cit.*, pp. 235-6.

‘the key to good science is separating the known from the unknown’¹⁶⁶, so in this understanding he says ‘science has only taken us back to the ‘Planck era,’¹⁶⁷ which is a fraction of a fraction of a second after the quantum moment ‘no-one yet knows what was there before the quantum moment or even why it happened, the way it did is an ‘unsolved mystery that makes fundamental physics so exciting.’¹⁶⁸ Unsolved mystery reminds us here of the mystery at the heart of Christianity, this is the language we use when we do not know, when what we are telling ourselves is a story and only that since the facts have run out. It is interesting to see how these two disciplines meet each other as both Christianity and science proclaim the mystery and the truth at the centre of their thought. O’Murchu tells us ‘both science and religion aim at observable, verifiable truths, using different but related methods,’¹⁶⁹ and both are a series of predictions and projections. The mystery of our beginnings remains shrouded in that quantum moment at ‘the beginning and the end’, the mysterious unknowing, a mystery that feeds our imagination and hopefully this on-going story that will give credibility to the female child’s spiritual value.

Keller invites us, both scientist and theologian, to look through another lens, her proposal is of “*creatio ex profundis*” a space of generosity and abundance. A visualization that turns ‘origins’ the age long proposition of a hegemonic orthodox interpretation of *creatio ex nihilo*, creation out of nothingness, on its head. We are invited into Keller’s argument where she considers a much more complex, uncertain opening point that hints at multiple beginnings

That ancient scripture imagines a messier beginning with no clear point of origin and no final end. The heteroglossic Deep – the Hebrew *tehom* or Primal oceanic chaos – already marks every beginning. It leaks into the bible itself, signifying a fluid matrix of bottomless potentiality, a germinating abyss, a heterogeneous womb of self-organising complexity, a resistance to every fixed order. It sweeps away myth of abstract potency...of the paternal Word...¹⁷⁰

Keller is reclaiming the long forgotten chaos of the deep ‘*Tohu Vabohu*.’ This is illustrated on the second panel of the mural in red string in Figures 28 and 29, which is subtle in its vulvic symmetry, locating the place of birth that Keller attributes to ‘*jouissance*’, the feminine and the mystical, thus making a way for multiple, marginalised subjects to reclaim emergent selves out of the depth of time and space in a theology of becoming. She invites us to defamiliarize

¹⁶⁶ Cox, *op.cit.*, p.9.

[illegible]

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.* p.10.

¹⁶⁹ O'Murchu, 2002, *op.cit.*, p.7.

¹⁷⁰ Keller, 2003, *op.cit.*, p.xv.



Figure 56 'In the Beginning' - 'Can You Hear Me?' watercolour Megan Clay 2009

Notebook illustrations in preparation for 'Monster of the Deep' Figure 17 on page 64 and 'Cosmic Cunt' Figure 57 on page 201.

There are many writings within feminist discourse that use the metaphor of the vagina or cunt with reference to female power and sexual pleasure. 'The value of sexual pleasure testifies to the more encompassing value of erotic power as sacred'. (Heyward, 1989, *op.cit.*, p.133) It is strange I had never really thought about what my cunt would have to say about how she was treated and heard in relationship to me. Furthermore I had not realised the socio/political implications regarding my gender and sexuality. Whilst I was seen as just the sum of my parts the wholeness of me in my becoming humanity was not seen. By this I mean my embodied self, everything I am is interconnected within my body and I myself am interconnected with the whole of the cosmos. I began asking the question, so what difference does it make whether that part of my anatomy has got a voice. Feminist body theologian Isherwood when speaking of Mary giving birth, tells us it does matter for all of the above reasons and more beginning at a very fundamental level of my being present in the world as female and the divinity of my vagina/cunt. She says because of this denial of real women's embodied experience, we need to

reclaim the vaginal aisle from phallic divinity...Our proud procession up the vaginal aisle is one of celebration of the real bodies of women; it is a glorious communion of menstrual blood, that internal/external eschatological promise, the bloody reminder of incarnational potential and celebratory waiting. We process our commitment to new birth that comes with tearing, screaming, shit and blood. It is a procession in awe of the incarnational reality of our being and one committed to telling our stories, stories of divine becoming in the shit, the blood and the awe of creation.

(Isherwood 'What the Fucking Difference Does it Make' in *The Journal of Feminist Theology BISFT*, 2003), pp.141-147.

Hatred of the body and its parts are more common than we often think amongst young women and girls. We can find a multitude of reasons for this phenomenon some of which are fairly legitimate, high expectations of a certain body type and shape and size of female genitalia and the corrective surgery of labiaplasty is another as we have seen with reference to the joys of teen sex in section1. The nurturing of bodily acceptance in their diversity from a young age in a celebratory way is crucial rather than see this shame and disgust in girls, adolescents and young women feel for their bodies and parts. Because self-esteem, love and respect begin at home in real bodies and it is from there that we flow out integrate and relate from and to others in the world. The commitment of reclaiming the humanity of women by feminists and feminist theologians is a legacy to be passed down to our female child to ensure her future of equal participation in the co-creative praxis of godding the earth. This is because the energy/dunamis of the cosmos is both innate and flowing all around and between us, it is both freely given and free to be received by all of humanity.

ourselves with the first two verses of the Genesis text which have interrupted the chaomic flow and she gives us another way forward that neither ignores nor erases what is past because the multi-layered complexity of this entangled web holds paradoxically the beauty and faith filled contributions of many. Nonetheless it has dominated, denigrated and sometimes destroyed the life of other diverse subjects leaving us wanting in the twenty first century and floundering in a global crisis. Desire and pleasure that settle for consumerist quick fixes that feed global capitalism in an on-going desire for more of the same shallow titillating satisfaction. This shallowness does not satisfy and we are left still with a yawning hole of desire yearning to be filled.

The beginning of an imagination that is interdependent with chaos, which Ralph Abraham suggests is crucial to the possibility of an inclusive creative potential.

Repression of chaos results in an inhibition of creativity and thus a resistance to imagination. The creative imagination, manifested most profoundly by people like Euler or Bach [*and many more both female and male, because we are not quite done with gender issues yet!!!*] should be functioning in everyone. People have a resistance to their own imagination.

¹⁷¹(*my italics*)

If we think of the creative imagination in art, performance both as dance and theatre, singing, playing instruments and writing poetry, prose, fiction, fact and academic works we can hope creative chaos is alive and flourishing! Our world is full of awesome imaginings that have grown into new spaces and understanding in history but ever evolving more excitingly from the twentieth century onwards illustrating an ever expanding imagination.

Keller talks about the feminine creative potential within chaos¹⁷² as opposed to the ordered dogma that has dominated the western religious imagination.¹⁷³ This has also been a theology of suppressed, suffocating, stiff, stagnated endings of salvific rationalised promises, that have, in the main, denigrated the feminine, children and other marginalised subjects in a tsunami of misunderstanding, contempt and exclusion that has swept down the last two millennia of Christianity. Christian theology Keller argues has created *ex nihilo* at the cost of the chance for a creativity that does not confuse itself with control.¹⁷⁴ Pleasure and desire its own depth.¹⁷⁵ The gap between *nihil* and the *tehom*¹⁷⁶ provides the creative possibility to nurture female lives for the future. My images of the female genitals, the 'Cunt' represent

¹⁷¹See Sheldrake, McKenna and Abraham *Chaos Creativity and Cosmic Consciousness* (Vermont: Park Street Press, 2001) p.40.

¹⁷² Keller, 2003, *op.cit.*, p.29

¹⁷³ *op.cit.*, p.xv.

¹⁷⁴ Keller, 2003, *op.cit.*, p.6.

¹⁷⁵ *op.cit.*, p.xvi.

¹⁷⁶ Long, *op.cit.*, p.105.

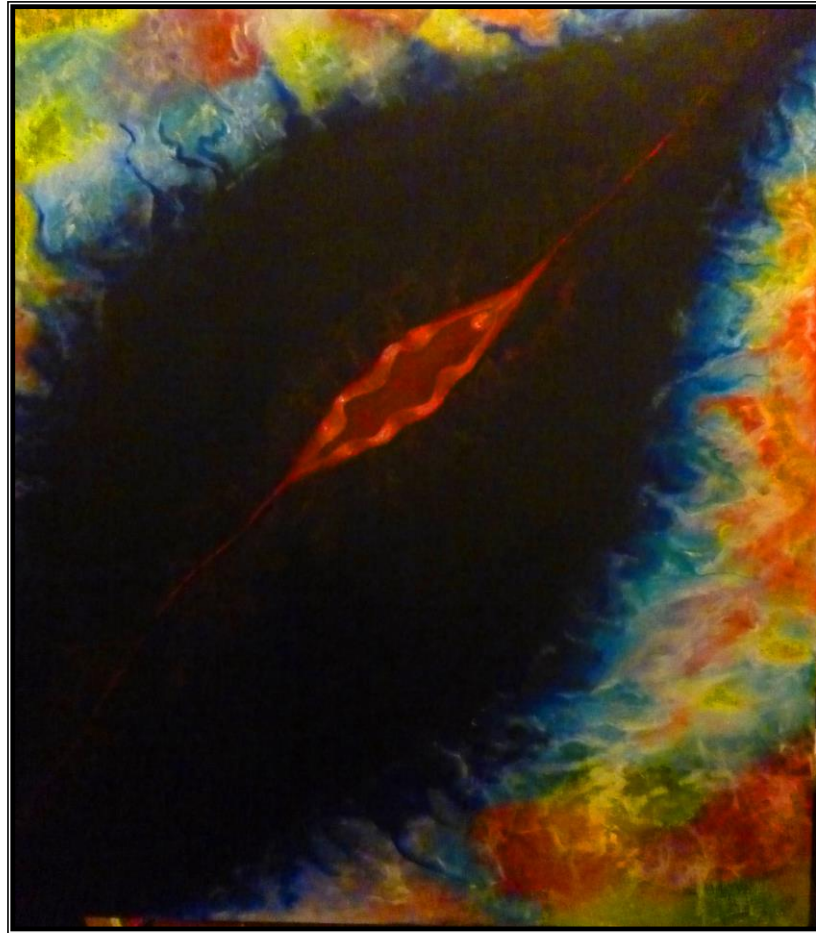


Figure 57 'Cosmic Cunt', acrylic Megan Clay 2009

This image represents female power and cosmic wonder, the energy of the cosmos is radiating outward from her depth. Red against black emphasises that power and passion. Red is also the longest wavelength in the light spectrum as an analogy that female power and creativity comes from deep space time. This depicts again Tohu Vabohu, chaos and the void.

This painting is also my response to Eve Ensler's question what would your vagina wear? (Ensler, *op.cit.*, p.103) Of course mine would be garbed with a quantum air. Looking past the bounds of patriarchy and robed in the beauty of the universe, empowered by energetic waves of becoming, to be present and heard. The Vagina Monologues opened up another level of understanding in me about female pleasure and the body and the amount of women who are left in the dark not only about the potential of their own sexual experience of pleasure and the sacredness of that, but also the awesome wonder of female bodies' creative power as they bring forth life. Sex education does not seem to regard female sexual pleasure and relationship as relevant but just seems to focus on the mechanical side of sex and male pleasure. It is in this mechanical act that we forget the wonder of the cosmic act of birthing new beings into existence.

We forget the vagina all of us,
 what else would explain
 our lack of awe and wonder.
 I was there when the doctor
 reached in with Alice in wonderland spoons,
 and there her vagina became a large operatic mouth,
 singing with all its strength.
 First the little head, then the gray flapping arms,
 then the fast swimming body,
 swimming quickly into our weeping arms,
 I was there later when I just turned and faced her vagina,
 I stood and let myself see.

(Ensler, *op.cit.*, pp.124-25)

female presence. Literally 'I am present' I think this is important to remember because this is so easily forgotten and has devastating effects on the lives of women as they get older. Eve Ensler uncovers buried lives and sexual unawareness through the experiences of women of different age groups and although there is a comical side to the performances presentation it is equally serious and also very sad that women's pleasure and desire has been side-lined and often ignored.¹⁷⁷

I have shown the seat of power and desire of women's genitalia 'cunt' to have been misused and abused and relegated to a position of 'Monster of the Deep' as Catherine Keller suggests in her work. This seat of woman's power has also been reduced to other swear words like 'twat' and 'cunt' or other forms of ridicule by men and equally denied and thought of as a space of shame and disgust by some women both young and old alike, as I have mentioned in section two. We cannot allow this to continue and we need to find a way of introducing body friendly stories that encourage empowerment for girl's sexual/spiritual lives and futures. The proposal offered by Keller of our beginnings being a 'Big Birth'¹⁷⁸ as opposed to a 'Big Bang' opens up a space of envisaged opportunity for feminine inclusion within the cosmic evolutionary story. Sheldrake fully supports this inclusion by saying 'One thing that is clear is that chaos is feminine, and creation out of chaos is like creation out of the womb, an all-containing potentiality emerging out of the darkness'.¹⁷⁹ The feminine face of the deep is looking out from her exiled seclusion, the forgotten deep, imprinted within the depth of her being. The name that reason has given her is 'monster of the deep' which can be seen in Figure 17 in section one and in two of the watercolours above in Figure 56 and the cosmic cunt image below in Figure 57, these are seen as the female seat of power. Tohu Vabohu, chaos, Tiamat, 'she is also referred to as a sea monster, a chaos monster and the deep'¹⁸⁰ she/chaos is waiting with pent up fury, a chaotic passion that will open the floodgates of her imminent labour; torrentially gushing forth a multitude of possible beginnings.

The primordial cosmic explosion panel shown in Figures 30-31 of the cosmic walk, was inspired by Keller's 'creatio ex profundus',¹⁸¹ this image also incorporates within its meaning the 'Monster of the Deep', 'Can You Hear Me' and the 'Cosmic Cunt'. The movement within these images demonstrate what is feared by patriarchal notions of her disruptive chaotic force threatening the rationalised order of the once and for all son of a metaphysical God who is

¹⁷⁷ Ensler, *op.cit.*, pp.28-30.

¹⁷⁸ *op.cit.*, p.xv.

¹⁷⁹ Sheldrake, 2001, *op.cit.*, p. 40

¹⁸⁰ Keller, 2003, *op.cit.*, p.26., also Long, *op.cit.*, p.104

¹⁸¹ *op.cit.*, p.40.

guardian of the Word. It is Keller's theomitic theology that heralds a way out from the abyss of her watery depth into her incarnational promise.

With her let us call into being the banished feminised part of the divine/Christ who can still be seen by those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, within both Hebrew and New Testament biblical texts, yet have been mostly invisible to the male gaze: Sophia Wisdom.¹⁸² She has sometimes been called in myth, the great creatrix¹⁸³ to describe her role in our great story of creation and Sophia Wisdom is an important part of the Christian incarnational legacy that has been forgotten and is invisible. If chaos is the forgotten feminine that was banished to the cosmic deep then her arising is perhaps made possible here I propose within a Sophia/Christological context as Keller says

...it derives the incarnation from the chaosmic width of creation. A chaosmic Christ would represent a flow of a word that was always already materialised, more and less and endlessly, a flow that unblocks the hope of an incarnation, in which all flesh takes part. But this new creation will not come forth *de novo ex nihilo*. It takes place within the shared spatiotemporal body of all creatures.¹⁸⁴

The opportunity opens up again to embrace women, children and the female child's divine incarnation in this new cosmological understanding of interconnection and interdependency. The spatiotemporal body includes everything on and in the earth and the earth itself and all heavenly bodies. This multifaceted divinity has no end to the wonders and diversity of an imagined potential future becoming because within each and every one of us we embody everything that was and is and is to come. These feminised chaotic beginnings 'propel everything forth in this great birthing process and with it, this strange "dark energy" that pushes the Universe infinitely out, in a centrifugal expansion that is paradoxically without centre...' ¹⁸⁵

We can no longer deny this creative force as we can no longer deny the feminine. After all the earth, the moon, nature and even the sun, 'was seen as female and this was encapsulated in the notion of the Queen of Heaven', ¹⁸⁶ all have been categorically feminised by mythological stories which are both positive and negative. The traditional theological belief that mankind is told to dominate the earth and all that lives in and on it, by 'God, is no longer tenable since we are part of what we may trample down and dominate. The Genesis story commands man to (Heb. *habas* = stamp down) and dominate (Heb. *rada* = trampling). This

¹⁸² *op.cit.*, p.150-51., also Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza *Jesus Miriam's Child Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (London: Continuum, 1994). The all-knowing model of female knowing, 'Sophia Wisdom' Figure 25 above on p.86.

¹⁸³ Long, *op.cit.*, p.122.

¹⁸⁴ Keller, *op.cit.*, p.19.

¹⁸⁵ *op.cit.*, p. xv.

¹⁸⁶ Long, *op.cit.*, p.102.

has led to the exploitation of the earth for the gains of capitalism and consumerism has taken the place of relationality. Every macrocosmic and microcosmic body and event is interrelated and has been impacted upon with the ideas and actions that have been generated from our literal interpretation of the Christian primal myth. Social dis-ease, the extinction of wildlife animals and insects alike, cutting down the rainforest and stripping the earth of its resources may be argued to stem from the desire to rule and the fear of the chaotic, both innate in the Christian story of origin. Sheldrake reminds us that 'Chaos is not something that degrades information and is somehow the enemy of order, but rather it is the birthplace of order.'¹⁸⁷ This order is not linear or tightly structured, it is free flowing, fluid and creative and has its own re-organisational skills to transform and begin again and again in diverse form. This can be heard and felt within the composition of a piece of music, a poem, seen and felt within visual art, dance and performance that includes movement of any kind, even the breathing in and out of life itself. It is both visible and invisible and forever in flux.

With regard to the reclamation of female identity, consciousness and incarnational potential, for those of us who are woman, Tess Tessier invites us to dance to the symbolic metaphor of the whirlwind¹⁸⁸ within, as a liberative praxis. This also references the panelled painting of Eurynome who is whipping up a whirlwind as a creative act. This illustrates an act of liberation for women encouraging them to reconnect to their own wildness the chaotic creativity within that has often relegated women to the realms of hysteria and even madness. This metaphor can be used within the new human cosmic story. This is the erotic connection that allows the freedom of creativity that operates within the diverse ways of being women rather than the denial of it.

Tessier writes about the sexual spiritual identity of women and asks the question: 'What happens to a woman's spiritual identity when certain key aspects of her sexual identity – her desires, her memories, her ability to see herself and be seen as a sexual being are routinely denied?'¹⁸⁹ Creation's primordial chaotic beginnings are interwoven with the wildness within each creative entity, the breath of the spirit that gives life which Thomas Berry draws our attention to, by saying

Wildness we might consider as the root of the authentic spontaneities of any being. It is that wellspring of creativity from whence comes the instinctive activities that enable all living beings to obtain their food, to find shelter, to bring forth their young: to sing and dance and fly through the air and swim through the depths of the sea. This is the same inner tendency

¹⁸⁷ Sheldrake, 2001, *op.cit.*, pp.97-113.

¹⁸⁸ L. J. Tessier *op.cit.*, Ch.1.pp.15-43.

¹⁸⁹ *op.cit.*, p.1.

that evokes the insight of the poet, the skill of the artist and the power of the shaman.¹⁹⁰

Paradoxically while this chaotic wildness within whirlwinds and nature can also bring destruction and death it can also bring new beginnings in different ways through the powerful destruction it unleashes. The same can be said for volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, the birth of stars and exploding supernovas, new beginnings can come from annihilating forces that are beyond our control yet are part of the multiplicity of realities of the on-going scenarios constantly in our world and in the cosmos; between this communion of subjects they are all inseparable. These are also on-going death and resurrection stories that bring new life very often after long and sometimes desolate periods of time during which we are not always aware of new life stirring within the underlying debris of seeming inertness that can sometimes feel hopeless. Yet within us something can stir, a spark of comfort, of possibility, of hope.

This energy that flows through us and in us is, as I have argued, inseparable from the integrated elements of our sexuality and spirituality. These two integral forces are elemental in all animate form, innate within each part of life's rich tapestry and if we accept that cosmic energy flows in and out of everything, we can include what has been thought of as inanimate with regard to energy so all are subjective. Sexuality and spirituality understood in this way are about deep connection, feeling and being emotionally in touch with each other and our environment in all that is and in all that is becoming, in all that is known and waiting to be known. My image of the quantum body in Figure 22, demonstrates those deep sexual/spiritual connections within the body that are also cosmic connections. Schneider talks about the intimacy of cosmic mutual relationality within a polydoxical frame of reference and she calls it 'Divine Promiscuity'.¹⁹¹ Keller suggests 'that it is as though she is amplifying a primal intimacy'.¹⁹² In human beings these two elements, I would argue, are innate from the moment of our conception and are not just limited to sexual pleasure or intercourse as already seen through Heyward's work rather they inform us of who we are in relation to our co-creative potential in the world and in our becoming in relationships of mutuality. These two elements also feed female pleasure and desire in terms of her creative potential not just in giving birth but in her relationships and in the expression of who she is through art, music, performance, dance, poetry and writing within its variety of genres. Discovering and realising their creative potential and being accepted has proven difficult for most women.

¹⁹⁰ Ervin Laszlo and Allan Combs, (eds), *Thomas Berry. Dreamer of the Earth: The Spiritual Ecology of the Father of Environmentalism* (Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2011), p.23.

¹⁹¹ Schneider, *op.cit.*, p.162

¹⁹² Keller and Schneider *op.cit.*, p.95

However we are born through the nurturing body of woman not man as the Christian story tells us in chapter one of Genesis. In the womb, in the watery moistness of our becoming, our sensuous bodies were formed through energy, touch and movement making us yearn for intimacy and relationship. Without touch and intimacy warmth and love we could not exist and we would soon die. Sue Gerhardt says

When parents respond to the baby signals, they are participating in many important biological processes. They are helping the baby's nervous system to mature...bioamine pathways to be set at a moderate level...contributing to a robust immune system...a robust stress response...to build up the prefrontal cortex...to build the capacity to hold information in the mind and reflect on feelings.¹⁹³

We are a creation of rich cosmic emergence out of which we have developed deep intimate connections. Intimacy and relationship begin in us with the human/divine connection; in the beginning is relationship and when we begin to know ourselves we begin to know the other, the other who we are interconnected with cosmically. We are cooked in the fiery belly of the stars that are created from hydrogen and helium gravity and nuclear infusion. Stars are our alchemists as when they die they produce the basic building blocks of life which are carbon and oxygen. The earth was made from the sun and because of the sun we have life on earth in abundance; a lush green earth that is moist. Three quarters of the earth is covered in water and we are made of mostly water, we are fluid yet made of the very stuff of the cosmos. My images painted alongside this work show this movement of energy.¹⁹⁴ In Psalm 139 the imagination of the psalmist speaks of the human unformed substance intimately becoming the divine/human relationship, being infused with her future incarnational potential.

For it was you that formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made...¹⁵.
My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret;
intricately woven in the depths of the earth...Your eyes beheld my
unformed substance...¹⁹⁵

Heyward's dunamis manifests itself again, as the divine erotic, life-force within, which is integral to our future well-being. So here we do not have favourite body parts or absenteeism of the body, this is a view from inside and out holistically. We are inwardly loved and glorified as well as externally and intricately connected to the earth and the cosmos and loved in the divine intimacy of mutually interdependent relationships, inclusively.

¹⁹³ Sue Gerhardt, *Why Love Matters: How Affection Shapes a Baby's Brain* (London, New York: Routledge, 2004), p.210.

¹⁹⁴ 'In the Depths of the Divine'; 'Awaiting Resurrection'; 'She is Risen'; 'A Place Where Stars are Born'; 'Invitation to the Cosmic Dance'; 'Quantum Being'; Sophia Wisdom'; Cosmic Cunt'; 'Monster of the Deep',

¹⁹⁵ Psalm 139: 13-15

Every cell of our body and the intrinsic nuclear subatomic activity is present, witnessed and made manifest in both the moment of conception and our formation in the womb. We in the west find it culturally hard to see ourselves as whole beings and intimate at every level of which there are many. A large number of girls and women alike also have difficulty loving who they are in their bodies. Yet the body's beauty is spectacular in all its multilayered splendour and intelligence. Scientific research shows that cells have memory¹⁹⁶ I would argue that our sensual perception of ourselves in relation to our environment begins here at the meeting point of our conception. The ongoing movement within the dark warm place of the womb gives us our sensual awareness. Mae Wan Ho says there is no doubt that a body consciousness exists prior to the 'brain' consciousness associated with the nervous system. This body consciousness also has a memory.¹⁹⁷ Imagine then a reality of that memory if it is within every cell of our body surely then there is a possibility that that memory can take us back to that single cell of multiplicity, the single cell that has not yet figured out how to multiply at the beginning of cellular life on earth. The cell that already holds self organisational skills which are full of incarnational potential and have been cooked and prepared in the fiery belly of stars that have been birthed by galaxies formed by the light and darkness in the deep, deep field of becoming. The universe has been awaiting the future arrival of its incarnational self in whatever sentient or inanimate form it may take. If we are all multiplicities of the singular then the echoes of those memories are still there in the resonance of atomic particles in our cells and in the strands of our genetic make-up of our DNA, the memories of intergalactic being of deep space time which is to become both within and without in all its glorious embodiment. This intrepid journeying toward our embodied being as human, surely then can be seen as transitionally inclusive of the many incarnational states that our fluid cellular memory has had and holds. The galactic interconnection goes very deep within life on earth as we have seen, as being made of the stuff of stars themselves and the very formation of the galaxies that birth the stars being chemically in tune with the cells of the embryo. I found Emily Conrad's research into cellular memory fascinating. As a dancer she relies heavily on the research of Grossinger and Ho, whose deep research into embodied processes throw an interesting light on the incarnational subjectivity of human becoming and the connections that both they and Conrad make with them

Embryonic life echoes the shaping of the first cell. From its inception, the embryo can be seen as spiralled water resonating with the nebulae in the galaxy. I use the term "nebulae" in the broadest sense, meaning that spirals whether galactic, embryonic or double-helixed as in DNA-are in universal "rapport." It is also interesting to note that the major component of a

¹⁹⁶ Ho, *op.cit.*, p.236.

¹⁹⁷ *op.cit.*, p.228.

nebula is hydrogen, which makes up two of the three atoms in water, the substance that is absolutely essential to life as we know it. Hydrogen interacts on our planet with oxygen in order to form H₂O (water).¹⁹⁸

The water in our bodies and water anywhere is not only capable of receiving energy but also of holding messages and being transformed. Masaru Emoto writes about the human connection with water and how we humans are made mostly of water and that water in our blood transports energy throughout our body. Our whole emotional and physical lives are dependent on this fluid phenomenon. 'When we are fluidly and emotionally flowing in our bodies we feel a sense of joy and move towards physical health'.¹⁹⁹ His research demonstrates that water is affected by how it is treated and forms crystals which continue to hold what he calls hidden messages. These messages can be changed depending on how we treat it, it can change and be transformed in life giving ways for us and creation. His discovery of how molecules are affected by our thoughts, words and feelings is quite revolutionary and since humans and the earth are composed mostly of water, his message is one of personal health, global environmental renewal and a practical plan of peace for each one of us'.²⁰⁰ The connections between water and the unexplored cosmos are seemingly endless the more we explore the more we uncover. Grossinger also makes very interesting cosmic connections when talking of embryonic life, his mantra as he writes is 'The embryo is the Universe writing itself on its own body'.²⁰¹ There is a spiralling of incarnation here with all that is, writing all that is becoming. The depth of embodied becoming holds mysteries yet to unfold, thus showing there is so much yet to learn about human unfolding and our potential for relationality and co-creative power in another way that is for all of creation.

Conrad as a dancer works in somatics through the movement method which she created as a way to recover health and well-being due to trauma in her own life. So the discovery of this movement method is in part experiential which, when channelled as a form of expression through dance and movement, becomes a transformative process, making the artist present, so is incarnational. The fluidity of movement is embedded within the fluid of the body and has a cosmic resonating connection as the dance becomes language in the offering of the conscious body to whoever receives and in turn reads it and can make connections with their own lived experience through that witnessing. This is relationality and the interconnection in action between energetic bodies of lived experiences that enable a healing

¹⁹⁸ Emilie Conrad *Life On Land: The Story of Continuum* (Berkley, California: North Atlantic Books, 2007). p.4.

¹⁹⁹ Masaru Emoto, *The Hidden Messages in Water* David A. Thayne (trans.) (New York: Beyond Words Publishing Inc., 2004). p.xvi.

²⁰⁰ *ibid.*

²⁰¹ Grossinger, *op.cit.*, p. xxix.

process to take place.²⁰² I suggest here that this somatic process speaks to theology as an incarnational possibility and is liturgical in its process. Incarnation and embodiment mean the same, in that they both speak of the lived in body. I propose that we all have this fluidity as a child, whose body is an open-ended system, flowing freely and with each movement and breath, in tune with other animate and inanimate forms that are also full of the cosmic reverberating rhythm. The embodied energy from the child's experience releases and transforms through the physicality of her movements. In this I am suggesting that Conrad demonstrates that our creativity is interconnected with our full embodied health and can heal us, allowing us to flourish toward an abundant life. By this I mean, as Conrad suggests, the fluid that acts within our bodily movement and energy flow is important to our well-being on every level of living. She talks about memory of our fluid selves from whence we came before we came on land and evolved further proposing that our cells will remember the watery womb of the ocean in our oceanic embodied lives.²⁰³ If we were to partake in the praxis of Conrad's movement continuum, we would not immediately become fluid it would take many movements to work through before we could re-member and release our body into a liberative space, however the possibilities become present in our awareness of what our embodied lives hold of our lived experience through these movements.²⁰⁴ Awareness of our bodies is important in regard to what they contain within an inhibited unhealthy praxis that keeps us stuck and locked into ourselves. We are as Conrad says fluid beings within both the fluid and energetic systems of our bodies. To be aware when energy blocks those systems is important because it is interconnects with the way we relate to ourselves, others and the whole of our earth environment. This is important to both female and male children. However because the dominating model in society is one of heteronormative masculinity, it has been shown that girls do not survive too well under it and become easily disempowered and energetically blocked because of it. This is a threat to their well-being, disrupts their creativity and prevents them from reaching their full potential. Conrad's method it can be argued gives an opportunity for change for the female child which will eventually have to bring change for the dominating models of masculinities. The awareness that this method could bring to the table is a relational consciousness that the present dominating model doesn't bring for either female or male gender.

Through what Conrad suggests is it then possible, that the earliest form of consciousness for us to intuitively re-member can be traced back to this primordial space

²⁰² Adler *op.cit.*, pp.59-77.

²⁰³ Conrad *op.cit.*, p.289.

²⁰⁴ Daria Halprin, *The Expressive Body in Life, Art and Therapy: Working with Movement, Metaphor and Meaning* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2003). p.17.

through our embodied cellular memory? Present in the cellular memory of the cells that form us, is both mitochondrial DNA which is only inherited through the mother and the nuclear DNA which is inherited from both parents. 'Mitochondrial DNA enables scientists now to trace ancestral lineage to seven daughters of Eve'²⁰⁵ and O'Murchu reminds us that mtDNA belongs to deep space time,²⁰⁶ further reminding us that 'she' has always been in what was, what is and what is to come. It is the energy from these cells that give us life and keep us alive. The memory lives on, bio evolutionist Elisbet Satouris says

Today we find the descendants of the ancient breathers multiplying in cells of every kind protist, fungus, plant and animal. ...Using the oxygen we breathe mitochondria make all the energy our bodies need to keep going and repair themselves. Without our mitochondria we would not be able to lift a finger. In fact it is these swarms of ancestral bacteria, working night and day keeping us alive.²⁰⁷

The energy of the mitochondria is particular to female biosphere, a conduit for the nurturing of others. Christianity has made this the major role for women a self-sacrificial labour of love and they have to get it right or they become the bad mother rather than the good and perfect mother. This is why Tessier uses the whirlwind metaphor for transformation and liberation for women who have had pretty traumatic experiences in their lives that often reflect these dominating factors. Stories of experience add to the rich mix of other stories that support the culture and traditions of communities and in this they are important. Personal stories also have the power to reflect communities and societies damaging ideologies and actions. Tessier's whirlwind metaphor for woman's liberative praxis interconnects with the wild dance of creativity, dancing the wildness within, reconnecting to life, new beginnings and shaking the dust of patriarchal definitions of the feminine off the heels of her feet. Ruether looks to a radical equality that is recognised in its participated value and not just as a token gesture. This is a way of articulating liturgical actualisation of reclaiming and reimagining,²⁰⁸ to reinstate the power of the feminine back into our 'humane' cosmic story. Mary Daly cries out on her plundering piratical bedazzling voyage²⁰⁹ a voyage in which she actually reflectively mirrors²¹⁰ troubling patriarchy's own pirating conduct throughout their subjugating misogynistic reign of terror on women. Science of womankind is on the list of her plundering quests. The art of spinning and weaving is seen as a liberative action to reclaim the bodies of women from male gynaecological enquiries, Daly noting that the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as "the

²⁰⁵ Bryan Sykes, *The Seven daughters of Eve* (London: Bantam Press, 1997), pp. 54-5.

²⁰⁶ O' Murchu, 2002, *op.cit.*, p.16.

²⁰⁷ Elisabet Sahtouris and James Lovelock, *Earthdance: Living systems in Evolution* (Lincoln: iUniversity Press, 2000). p.101.

²⁰⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983, *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ Daly, 1992, *ibid.*

²¹⁰ Mary Daly 'The Looking Glass Society' in Loades, *op.cit.*, p.191.

department of medical science which treats of the functions and diseases...science of womankind.”²¹¹ Her use of language emphasises words and their multiple meanings as a liberative praxis of radical feminism²¹² for the release of women from their entrapment within the patriarchal word and their practices through it. Daly tells us that

Gyn/Ecology is by and about women, a-mazing all the male authored “sciences of womankind,” and weaving world tapestries of *our own kind*. That is, about dis-covering, de-veloping the complex web of living/loving relationships of *our own kind*. It is about women living, loving, creating our Selves, our cosmos. It is dis-possessing our Selves, enspiriting our Selves, hearing the call of the wild, (*chaos*) [my italics] naming our wisdom, spinning and weaving world tapestries out of genesis and demise.²¹³

Marduk rips Tiamat’s body apart in order to create air, sea and land, which is in fact, earths bio-environment. It is in fact the dismemberment of the Goddess, the symbolic representation of the cutting and slicing of women’s bodies.²¹⁴ In this tale she has gathered many names of terror, she is the great sea monster, a monstrous fiery dragon the first to be created and monster of the deep which Keller talks about in chaos and the void of our beginnings; the myth also names the hero Marduk as saviour, war hero and dominator. Hence the end of the matriarchal cultures that Carol Christ²¹⁵ and Marija Gimbutas²¹⁶ have alerted us to, heralding the beginning of a dominant male militaristic state of warring over territorial rights. To retain this story as it is told in this way would mean retaining mastery over the female gender rendering her sexually passive and powerless having to remain contained within a patriarchal definition. This mastery domination, as Plumwood tells us has multiple layered implications politically, socially and ecologically in relation to women of race, sexuality/spirituality and gender. My argument would be for a positive feminist image within this story rather than the established one which is both fantastical and untrue telling only the historical sacrificial role of woman and mother and therefore setting an extremely negative role model for the female child and legitimising a masculinity that is limiting and self-destructive. The stories we tell our children need to be ones that hold truths that encourage relational consciousness, stories that demonstrate dominating behaviour and unequal power relations are not helpful so when Abram and Primack advise that the stories have to be able to withstand a reality check the Father Christmas story is not the only story that would fail this.²¹⁷ There are far deeper

²¹¹ Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (London: The Women’s Press Ltd., 1991), p.10.

²¹² *op.cit.*, p.11.

²¹³ *op.cit.*, pp.10-11.

²¹⁴ Isherwood and Althaus-Reid 'Slicing Women’s Bodies: Christianity and the Cut Mutilated and Cosmetically Altered Believers', in Althaus-Reid and Isherwood, 2008, *op.cit.*, pp.1-6.

²¹⁵ Christ, *ibid*.

²¹⁶ Marija Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1991).

²¹⁷ Abram and Primack, *op.cit.*, p.161.

disturbing stories that are held in the storytelling circuit that need to lose their patriarchal power before we can move on and make room for others that are relational and life giving. The reality is that all women have this embodied creative potential to produce life, nurture and maintain it. Women's creativity lies in their seat of power, the interconnection between the heart and female sexuality illustrated in Figures 15 and 22 which look at the energy fields specifically in the female body. This is a cosmic depiction of an imaginary look as well as one born out of sensory experience in my own body. This is how I see an embodied sexual/spiritual connection which also embodies the emotional and intuitive knowing of the female body and this is where my art is painted from. This sexual and spiritual connection has the power to create the feminist theological underpinning that liberates women from their lived experience within a patriarchal stronghold. Our spiralling incarnational lives need to gather together an embodied cosmic story that spins and spirals positively for our girl child. The generational span needs to encompass all ages of woman with the respect of each generation for the other.

There is a song from the folklore of the copper woman that has been used in folk singing and the woman's movement, it uses a circular metaphor celebrating 'old woman's' creative power and wisdom as she becomes its embodied manifestation

Old woman is watching, watching over you
In the darkness of the storm, she is watching
She is weaving, mending, gathering the colours
She is watching over you

Chorus

So weave and mend
Gather the fragments safe
And win the sacred circle sisters
Weave and mend, weave and mend,
Oh women, weave and mend

Old woman is weaving, gathering the threads
Her bones become the loom she is weaving,
She is watching, weaving, gathering the colours
She is watching over you

Chorus

For years I've been watching, waiting for old woman
Feeling lost and so alone, I've been watching.
Now I find her weaving, gathering the colours
Now I find her in myself.²¹⁸

The power of the divine/Goddess and Sophia wisdom of old woman is the female child's future cycle of becoming let her grow and become, growing old wisely, gracefully, outrageously not

²¹⁸ Anne Cameron, *Daughters of Copper Woman* (Vancouver: Harbour Publishing co. Ltd., 2002), p.198.

always silent, always in touch, connected energised as she grows sexually/spiritually in each transitional stage gathering the thread as she weaves, 'It mends the broken ties...*she* who spins and weaves the tapestries of Elemental creation'.²¹⁹ (*my italics*) Weaving her story through her own cosmic becoming.

It is the telling of the story, the expression of it, the listening and the witnessing of it that helps deliver the understanding of the process of becoming in the weaving and mending. Laurel Schneider's challenge is to assume a 'storyteller's posture' 'that might heal an "estrangement between belief and imagination, story and credibility in the telling of Christian theology.'²²⁰ Feminist liberation theology encourages such stories to be woven with mythologies that feed the process of reimagining, reinventing and restoring a positive understanding of who women are in the world. Weaving and quilt making²²¹ are analogous in showing the colourful diversity in the experience of being woman and re-membering her. Schneider says 'Stories build, and they un-build. Enchanted stories, stories of power, scriptural stories, medicine stories and powerful stories do not just transport truth or existential reality they also create and un-create it.'²²² Many women have an estrangement from the monotheistic faith, with a view to looking beyond God the father, taking them into a paradoxical realm of uncertainty but not necessarily losing their faith. The constructed Christian story under the one and true God as history has told it, has created, exclusion and confusion on many ontological levels. The lives of women historically have been locked into this space of definition to live their lives within these narrow parameters. Even the ones that seemingly break out and celebrate their freedom are not truly free, as many find both within institutionalised working lives and outside of them, there are still many restrictions beyond the set perimeters. The male world has boundless boundaries for itself in the realm of patriarchy and as Daly quite rightly tells us 'it is a global affair'.²²³ the world she is set in? The painting of the child Christa which can be seen in the watercolour below and also Figure 1 'The Secret' in the introduction demonstrates the embodied experience of just one child, me. This could be seen as an example for many female children across a spectrum of experiences like me, realising somewhere inside the possibility of a life filled with an embodied freedom of passion which very quickly becomes fragmented. The sexual and spiritual already aroused but the reality beyond childhood slowly becoming an impossibility because of the rigorous rules of a masculine world that began very early to dictate how to live one's life. This image therefore shows the crucified impact not only of the other's projection of sexual power, which in this

²¹⁹ Mary Daly, *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), p.xii.

²²⁰ *op.cit.*, 152.

²²¹ Schussler Fiorenza, *op.cit.*, p.x.

²²² Schneider *op.cit.*, p.111.

²²³ Daly, 1991, *op.cit.*, p.112.



Figure 58 'Female Child Christa' watercolour Megan Clay 2009.

The process of remembering my childhood experience was a slow dawning and at first I did not realise the full impact of it until I slowly felt like I was being shut down, it was killing me softly, taking my dreams and crushing them with a reality that terrorised and humiliated me into thinking it was my fault. I can remember the anxiety and worry about this terrible secret I had inside, of something that not only happened once but several times throughout childhood to my teenage years. The painting shows my pleasure and pain a paradox created by my own now impassioned sensually informed body and the external structures of male authority and power that would fail me for a long time to come throughout my life as a female, from childhood to womanhood. That inequality of power was in every aspect of my life and I was deeply affected by it and found it hard to make choices about what to do in my life. I was not like other girls or so it seemed their lives measured very differently to mine emotionally and materially and when girls, friends of my own age reached the age of discussing first time sex and virginity and boyfriends I knew then that I was different. However time has since told me that we are not so different after all, it's just that within this heteronormative male centred world I found that I had had a head start of knowing without choice and without grounded empowerment to change my world as a female child.

This image shows my crucified child who has lived within the locked secret place of her sexual/sensual world. Travelling through life and relationship that echo this experience unwittingly which became the key to bring these childhood experience to consciousness where I found art as my creative channel to express those experiences. This form of creativity becomes my body language a way of speaking what is felt at a deep level. This experience was woven into the depth of my being and grew with me into womanhood always threatening like a volcano waiting to erupt the hot molten lava, the creative fire of my sexuality/spirituality, dunamis. Tessier says that 'as women rage and weep, own their suffering and their growth, pound their feet on the skin of their pain and dance the dance they choose. We can turn from them in dread, dismissing them as manifestations of madness, or we can open ourselves to them and join in dancing after the whirlwind'. (Tessier, *op.cit.*, p.43.)

I found my creativity within myself because it was present in my environment through my mother, not forced on me, but it was present, it was the energy that impacted on me and became an impulse in that sustained me as a child. My experience I realise now nurtured the way I paint, how I think and how I can continue to find ways to live my life differently.

case is male, but also multiple levels of awakening in me, something my body has not quite understood in the relationship that had been forced upon me. Re-visiting this image makes me question the choices that I still make today, it also takes me into a feeling of isolation, a remembering of feeling so lonely and powerless. I was for a long time full up with feelings and emotions that I was not yet able to express. I think my saving grace as a young child was that my mother played the piano and I remember dancing, it was the beginning of my love for music and expression through movement that sustained me.

However this intrusion on my sexual/sensual world continued for a good many years and I was unable to speak about it and so it remained my troubled companion until my child finally confronted me as a woman at the age of thirty three. My creative impulse to use my body as a channel for many years to express and relinquish those feelings of entrapment was important for my well-being. These impulsive activities included, when I was younger, art, gymnastics, dance and as I grew older singing, running and anything that I was capable of physically, which was able to express and exorcise the emotional turmoil that circulated within me, a turmoil which was looking for a space to be seen and heard.

Art first became a serious contender in self-expression when I reached the age of thirty three. At this point I was battling for my sanity and my physical drive began to flag as all my energy was fighting to keep at bay the madness I was beginning to feel due to the overwhelming chaos that had begun to take over my world. Art and music were now a priority at this point, creative channels that would grant me passage out of this newly revived terror that I was experiencing. The point of this story in relation to girlhood today is that the impact of patriarchy continues to rain upon female bodies and this begins in childhood. Even if we begin with the idea that the female child will never have equality from the integrity of her own body for as long as the Church or society has the power to say so. The Church maintains within its structure limitations on the female body and empowers only within its tight boundaries of heteropatriarchy that control the level of leadership within the various denominations of Christendom. Society still encourages female definition within its male hegemonic bounds which bombard female bodies with the power of her own sexiness groomed for the male gaze. The young female body is infiltrated from birth and this becomes a physical reality, the body feels before it knows so what is said and done unto her is always felt but not necessarily expressed and so remains hidden within the body.²²⁴ The body acts out that experience within its social environment according to the rules laid down for her, she gathers information of who she is and lives her life through that information but it is not necessarily from her own grounded integrity. The body feels before it knows and needs time to understand and most

²²⁴ Hartley, 1995, *ibid*.

importantly it needs to find a creative channel to express that knowledge that has been felt, the knowledge of her integral sexual/spiritual power.

There are many feminist liberation theologians that are free in the knowledge of monotheism's entrapment and remain to fight the corner of women theologically and I have become one of them through my experience. Cosmology can theologically incorporate the divine/Jesus in *dunamis* and in who we understand Jesus to be in his humanity in relation to the divine feminine wisdom²²⁵ of the cosmic quantum energy. That is, if he can remain free of the Christian confines that have contained him so rigidly. This is where the hope for change lies for the female child's sexual/spiritual life in abundance. One that unfolds, that can help her successfully resist giving away her pleasure and desire to patriarchy. Myth, science and religion is a good place to start weaving our cosmic story with the myriad of multiple possibilities, at starting points that go beyond the understanding that we have been encouraged to believe under the 'one;' stories that include the multiplicity and entanglement of being and becoming within the cosmos right down to the level of our cellular daily lives and beyond into every micro multiple possibility. This is not only a spiritual response but the very basis of our spirituality born out of quantum being. This also links in with the spirituality of the child in section two, where the stories of imagination²²⁶ or spiritual experiences that they may have and tell, are sometimes not heard because of a misconception of the imagined and do not always have an obvious religious or theological underpinning. But unconsciously our histories do influence our imagination. The embedded-ness of cultural history and yes, even pre-history will always show itself theologically and religiously through the expressive inspired human body, it is a way in my view of gifting ourselves to one another, the earth and the cosmos, these ways have no obvious language but flow within the intuitive realm of our being.

²²⁵ 'Sophia Wisdom' Boyce-Tillman explores the lost wisdom of 'divine/Sophia' through other feminist theologians drawing her own conclusion of a 'Sophia/Christ' in Boyce-Tillman, *op.cit.*, pp.39-50., also, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word: Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Context* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), pp.1-21.

²²⁶ Kate Adams, Brenan Hyde and Richard Woolley, *The Spiritual Dimension of Childhood* (London, Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2008), p.59.

Conclusion

This conclusion will give an overview of the scholarship I have covered in addressing the question of my thesis. It will also examine in depth three main points of originality that my research has raised. These are first, to look at how my art work contributes to the discussion in terms of its methodological potential as a co-creative praxis. Second, how integral and important sexuality and sensuality are for the female child and her empowerment and development as a co-creative participator in the ongoing cosmic story. I will also discuss the paradoxical nature of sexual abuse/sensual pleasure that are created by these two elements on several levels. This discussion will include a social understanding, of how the adult world socially constructs and governs what is right or wrong for the female child's developing body. Third I will discuss how this work focusing on the female child can also be used to create a theological cosmology frame of reference for women. However the importance of the primacy of the female child should not be lost in this.

The Story So far

This thesis began with asking why we do not even in the most radical theologies spend too much time, if any, developing theology in relation to the sexual and spiritual lives of the child. The integral link between those two fundamental parts of our humanity has not been fully acknowledged in traditional Christian theology within the lives of adults let alone the lives of our children and the female child. It was my intention to find a way in which we could begin to develop a theology for the child that had spirituality and sexually integrated within the model that I create. As my research progressed I became increasingly uncomfortable with what appeared to be the limits of even the most radical theologies in relation to the female child. It was at this time that I began to research the emerging discipline of quantum theology and its roots in what has been called by Swimme and Berry, the Universe Story¹ or the new cosmology. This was an unexpected turn in my research but an exciting one as it appeared to offer new possibilities for a new starting point that may be free of the difficulty to remove roots of patriarchal dualism and the destructive metaphysics that springs from it.

Section One showed that sexuality is not openly discussed with regard to the child and that it is and has been a fairly taboo area. I engaged with the provocative question that Dale Martin² asks about Christ's sexuality which is a widely discussed area of radical theology of sexuality and gender. This was not to legitimise female sexuality because it obviously cannot. It does however hint at how an asexual nature has been used as the way to reach a higher

¹ Swimme and Berry, *op.cit.*, p.16.

² Martin *op.cit.*, p.92.

spiritual plain, which appears to be a male's way of thinking. I noted through looking at Dori Grinko Baker's³ and Anne Phillips⁴ work that girls become silenced and can enter quite passively into the patriarchal world of subjugation because most if not all girls are groomed to one extent or another for that world. That is to say, they are all assumed to be headed for the heteropatriarchal construct of sexual lives based as it still is in unequal power relations. I looked at the difficulties adolescent girls have in developing relationally within heterosexual-normative models of masculinity that show little respect for their pleasure and desire. These were uncovered within the 'Male in the Head' research project⁵ together with the high statistics of STD's, unwanted pregnancies, lack of respect for the female body in relationship and the masculine hegemonic control over it. Also noted are the way girls give into the sexual games that revolve around the male body and his pleasure. Further investigation using Lisa Isherwood's work revealed eating disorders and body hatred⁶ thus limiting the divine fleshiness of incarnational reality, as does the sexualising of the child and adolescent girl's body within the voyeuristic male gazed world of media, fashion and the market place where girls both consume and are consumed.⁷ Nelson's body theology enabled me to explore the dualistic split between a disconnected hard up phallic God that represented the damaged vulnerable needy male and the consequent denial of the feminine within the divinity of the godhead. Broken relationships with the self, the other and with the world were the result of this elemental splitting apart. Nelson sympathised with this male denial of vulnerability, leading to the exerting of powerfully, privileged control and the devastation it brings. While his work describes the problem it does nothing for girls.

Contemporary Christian theological thinking in sexuality and gender appears split between the radical sexual theology of Althaus-Reid, the erotic power of love through Heyward's *dunamis* and the radical incarnation of Isherwood's feminist Christologies and the limited perspectives of Christian Church thinking and their reports on human sexuality. The Church reports I read on sexuality were mainly saying the same things with children barely visible. Children were addressed within the Windsor report with regard to sexual abuse bunched together with domestic violence and homosexuality. The Vatican report addressed human sexuality in sex education within a heterosexual relationship and within the sacrament of marriage and procreation. The Church reports demonstrated limited views on the diversity of human sexuality which would undoubtedly affect the female child's sexuality, self-esteem and future autonomy. Radical feminist theology of sexuality and gender also revealed the

³ Baker, *op.cit.*, p.87.

⁴ See Phillips, *ibid.*

⁵ Holland, Caroline Ranazonogla, Sue Sharpe and Rachael Thompson, *op.cit.*, pp.156-74.

⁶ Isherwood, 2008, *op.cit.*, p.25.

⁷ Durham, *op.cit.*, p.24.

child's absence. However these radical theologies held the possibility for future sexual analysis of the female child's life, because of the embodied approach they advocate toward the incarnational and relational subjectivity of women. Heyward's work gives an opening to view the girl child's life as co-creative and taking her part in godding others and the earth. Sexuality is more than just a sex act for Heyward who understands it as part of justice seeking in the world and an essential aspect of human creativity. Isherwood's body theology gives insight to the potential of the child's ability to reside in her body confidently in her divinity whilst breaking free from the constraint, of patriarchal ties that have bound her female body. Her work enabled me to look at the Christological possibilities for future girlhoods which was important as I wished to provide a model that sits within a Christian frame. I was able to demonstrate the difficulties within heteronormative structures in schools and society that fail the child on various levels in relationship and to offer diverse ways of being in the body in childhood, through touch and healthy intimacy. Queer theology offered a way to transgress the boundaries of the taboo world of children's sexuality and to look through another lens at embodied lives that are full of movement and surprise, aiming toward an abundant life. I have found that feminist liberation theologies in their radical thinking are vehicles that transgress borders into new ways of seeing, thinking and acting. It enables us to move from understanding sex as a series of acts that signal our place in the gendered hierarchy to understanding it as an incarnational act that leads us from sexual intimacy to the intimacy and relationships within community. The radical theologies I engaged with show that loving your body is an intimate act, that leads to intimacy with others and the rest of creation and helps shape our environment and in return who we are. However by the end of Section One I also found an absence of children and particularly the girl child. I was not satisfied that radical theologians working in the area of gender and sexuality had done anything for the child, but using their work I could see a frame that might further be developed for the child.

Section Two looked at the spiritual life of the child and asked the question who the energetic, open, vulnerable child was questioned to be in Christian theology and religious education. The world of the Church Fathers confirmed the limited view of the child which they developed from scripture. I read more than I demonstrate in the thesis but the Fathers repeat much the same rhetoric and again this did not advance my thesis. What I did show through the Fathers was the repetitious way that asexuality, innocence and purity were used for the model child and that this model was also used as a template for the adult as a child of God. For me this space was the root in Christian history that had rigidly shaped and stunted the child's embodied spiritual lives. What emerged was the influence of these male Fathers on contemporary life and how many theologians cannot move on from these teachings even

when it is evident they do not address contemporary understandings of the child. This is evident in the work of Bunge⁸ and McLemore,⁹ who address the silenced voice of the child in Christian thought, but wish to retrieve it through the ideology of the Church Fathers. This was a method I could not agree with, because it still incorporated such unrealistic moral values, that were dictated from an external male God and not from within. Moral values that were so far removed from an incarnational model of the human/divine that Heyward and Isherwood's Christologies offer. McLemore raises the question of the maternal role and its ability to stand against the negative attitudes of patriarchal history towards the child. Whilst this is crucial in relation to mother and daughter relationships that have been damaged I could not discern McLemore's use of a deep gender analysis which in my view is needed in order to overcome patriarchal constraints. For me the work of Daly who looks deeper into the patriarchal problem in her work *GynEcology*¹⁰ and Ettinger who develops the notion of the matrixial borderspace¹¹ offered more possibilities than a reworking of even the best bits of patriarchal history. Daly calls for the recovery of the colonised body of woman socio/politically and scientific/gynaecological and does not believe this is possible without unmasking and moving beyond what patriarchy has laid down in all these areas. I believe that Ettinger takes on another father of the phallus, Freud, in her situating of becoming subjects in utero thus empowering both mother and child as subjects in mutual relation. Section Two examined the work of religious educators in relation to the development of the spiritual lives children. My conclusion was that much of the work does not have theological underpinning because most of the researchers are not theologians. For me their insights might be useful but did not help in the development of my main aim, the creation of an empowering theology for the female child. Where theologians did look at the lives of children they attempted to fit children into already existing theological patterns. In many cases simply taking the thoughts of the Church Fathers and attempting to place them in a modern context. For many scripture was seen as the primary source for forming and nurturing the spiritual lives of the child. As we know well from the work of Schüssler Fiorenza and others this starting point is not without its problems for women and thus also for the female child but as I have shown gender is not an issue for most educators and gender analysis is not a priority.

In this section the work of Linda Hartley, Peter Levine and Maggie Kline demonstrated how trauma damages bodies and how this moves through many generations affecting lives in the future. This damage is often overlooked and forgotten when it is inflicted through the

⁸ Bunge, *ibid.*

⁹ Miller McLemore in Marcia Bunge, *op.cit.*, Ch.17.pp.446-73.

¹⁰ Daly, 1979, *op.cit.*, pp. 134-152..

¹¹ Ettinger in Pollock, *ibid.*

systems under which we live such as Church and society. I consider that the dualistic and body denying tradition within Christianity has done damage to many particularly those who are not at the top of its hierarchies this is why I felt a consideration of this work was relevant. Further, Judith Herman speaks of episodic amnesia¹² by which she means that a trauma does not ever fully heal but just gets buried throughout generations and can still affect later generations. I believe that this is the case with the female child who may still be suffering from this condition after generations of female denying and defaming theology. I believe there is enough evidence for this suggestion supplied in Section Two in relation to the spiritual formation of the female child. I believe I demonstrated that the doctrines and practices of Christianity can continue trauma rather than heal it. This is a theme I will develop in post-doctoral work as it has not been explored in depth by others.

The layers were gradually being peeled away and I was continually being greeted by an entangled mess. Every time I saw an opening and tried to enter to find a way forward I realised how enmeshed in dualistic metaphysics our heritage is, both secular and religious. As my research progressed I realised that there were other starting points and this is the substance of Section Three. I entered the world of the new cosmology of Catholic theologians Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry who opened the door to a story that was potentially outside the tight self-perpetuating confines of Christian doctrine yet within the Christian story. Swimme and Berry take us back to our beginnings, but to a much wider realm in which to set the scene and to rediscover the lives of girlhoods. Diarmuid O'Murchu's quantum theology expands the quantum field, while Catherine Keller further opens the door with a theology of becoming in Tohu Vabohu where she rehabilitates chaos and puts the feminine back into the narrative. O'Murchu¹³ drew my attention to the presence of darkness and the fearful concepts that have built around it and for me this included those of female embodiment. He helps to reverse the negative thoughts about darkness by saying that this is an energetic darkness and that darkness is needed it seems to realise life's meaning and purpose. Others like Abrams and Primack, Greene, and Winter show the activity of this energy as dark energy, string theory and quantum and the sub atomic level of that activity. By doing so they opened the door to the divine of the quantum field of energy that encompasses everything in the Universe. This energetic darkness, I have demonstrated, can be equated with Heyward's *dunamis* and it is this that we embody so that we may become co-creators and god each other and the earth. Isherwood's incarnational becoming situates us as global citizens within a cosmic community of subjects just as Berry suggests. While Keller opens the floodgates of a creation story that

¹² Hermann, *op.cit.*, p.7.

¹³ O'Murchu, 2004, *ibid.*

has been, she says, deeply misinterpreted by theologians who have ignored the possibilities of multiple beginnings. The floodgates she has opened from Tohu Vabohu have released a cosmic flood of humanity that has the potential to reveal the diversity and multi-layered complexity of divine becoming. Heyward, Isherwood and Keller offer the opportunity to overcome the notion of fixed ends and outcomes to which we all, even children, have to be moulded. They show that incarnation is wilder than this, free to develop into worlds we have not even thought possible and it is their link to the new cosmology that is crucial for my own development of a new starting point for girls.

I was now able to begin to reflect and illustrate the deep resonating effect and interconnectivity our cosmic unfoldings have on our diverse embodied lives if we are open to the flow/field/dunamis. The cosmic unfolding of our evolutionary process shows how deeply interconnected and interdependent we are. Mae-Wan Ho and Richard Grossinger demonstrate these intricacies, Ho looks at memory and consciousness of cells whilst Grossinger looks at how we incarnate the cosmos and how the life of the embryo unfolds and becomes, showing us also how the embryo mirrors its galactic ancestry and in this way is awesomely and powerfully made. We are the stuff of the stars cooked in their fiery bellies, we could not be more embedded in this powerful story and this energy is ours to make use of in ethical lived realities. Many of humanity's religious stories have demonstrated this powerful/mystical link but much became subsumed under a deadening dualism which according to Heyward made us afraid of our power and passion. However Christian theology as it throws off the yoke of dualistic metaphysics is also beginning to engage once again with our embedded and powerful humanity, my work adds to that trajectory of theology. The work of Linda Hartley and Emily Conrad in the area of movement and breath demonstrates the importance of both in re-covering, re-membering and maintaining well-being and life I combined this with the work of Irigaray's and her exploration into the importance of breathing for women if they wish to gain spiritual autonomy. For her as for me this is not simply a matter of physical exercise it is tapping into the very breath of the divine, the same breath that moved over the waters at creation, the ruach that is the essence of life.

My work has not avoided addressing the difficulties that face females and female children as they struggle with divine unfolding. I have looked at the difficulties that girls have struggling to be seen beyond the prism of passive objects and empty vessels that Kincaid warns us against in the name of innocence and purity,¹⁴ that simply receive societal and church wisdom on who they should be and become. We know this, however, I have taken these struggles and attempted to situate them within the field of morphic resonance and showed

¹⁴ Kincaid, *op.cit.*, p.15.

through Rupert Sheldrake's hypothesis of morphogenic fields that these are not, nor have their ever been, individual struggles of isolated girls and women, nor are they simply political struggles of groups as feminist theory has suggested they are in fact energy fields which affect girls through generations and across continents.¹⁵ In a very real sense when my sister suffers so do I as does the planet itself. He tells us that fields hold memory, information and habitual resonance which informs and demonstrates the effects these multiple girlhoods can have on each other and the earth community of the wider unified field. Of course this process also works in reverse and the earth communities of the wider unified field can have effects on girls. Through the work of Cannato I demonstrated a way out of what may appear a bleak scenario as morphogenic fields can be used as spaces for transcendence and transformation and furthermore can become fields of compassion. Cannato's idea of creating compassionate fields of energy is crucial, but we have to create wider and deeper fields of compassion in order to meet the needs of humans and other sentient beings on a planetary scale. Theologically then, this field of compassion has to move outside of the comfortable space of the safe confinement of church communities and into the space of risk and uncertainty of a cosmic Christic community, that is filled with dynamis of which Heyward speaks, along with the risk taking, multifaceted Christ that Isherwood suggests. Cannato's suggestion is profound but I found it contained within a rather traditional church theology rather than in the reality of life and opportunities of that enfleshed divine rollercoaster.

Cannato's work highlighted for me one of the obstacles I had perceived in the work of many of the thinkers I much admired and found helpful. This was reluctance, even when speaking of such matters as polydoxy, to give up the notion of the 'One'. Monotheism did not seem to be a notion most theologians wished to concede yet its rigid interpretation was often acknowledged by them as the basis of many of the exclusions that plague the world. These are the 'either ors' that countless feminist theologians have pointed out as unhelpful, the way in which this mono God is understood to be a certain set of traits thus excluding those who lack the same. Kristeva and Schnieder proved good companions in examining monotheism as they demonstrated the way in which it has played such a large and not always helpful part in our storytelling. Schneider I found in particular has a huge part to play in future scenarios that can incorporate female divinity into the story telling mix. Through theologies of polydoxy and her insightful rooted knowledge of the stories¹⁶ we tell and how they work. Of course under the male God as Daly so clearly demonstrated the male will rule and the female will always be lacking. I had come to a crucial point in the thesis, what to do with God in this story of divine

¹⁵ Sheldrake, 2009, *op.cit.*, p.106.

¹⁶ Laurel Schneider, *op.cit.*, pp. 107-126.

cosmic unfolding? As a Christian theologian I was not keen to do away with God even when the male God had seemed to do so much harm to women and the female child. Schneider provided the platform to consider transcendence in another way and thus to envisage the divine in a way that could fit more easily with the unfolding universe story. For her the 'One' has no place but rather the transforming and transcending power of the original stories that have become over time fossilised into the 'One' remain of supreme importance in our lives. This enabled a movement in my work at this crucial point where I appeared to be at an impasse. I challenged traditional monotheism yet stayed with the Christian story.

I also looked at how spiritual transformations can be initiated through the work of Tessier and Daly and others in feminist liberation theology. In my work I have focused on the needs of girlhood, but this is only one area of need amongst many, many others. Multifaceted beings that are part of a much bigger embodied divinity. The work in section three offered an opportunity within a cosmic unfolding of interconnective interdependency to make new relationships with a radical equality with others on an open ended continuum. To date no one has attempted to create a theology for children based in a conversation between quantum theology, the new cosmologies, body theology and feminist theologies and so this is my originality. I believe this conversation has been productive and laid the foundations for a developing theology which places the girl child outside the boundaries of traditional dualistic theology in a place where her female nature may be valued but not prescribed. Having open-ended access to the cosmological community is outside the bounds of patriarchal definition and as long as we are consciously relational and open this energy is there for all of us male and female alike and for all the differences in-between. My work has shown that the female child is largely absent even in the most radical theology of sexuality and spirituality and that this exclusion has deep roots which in my view have harmed generations of female children and adult women. The work I engaged with on fields and generational trauma added originality and depth to my analysis and enabled us to see that the feminist assertion that no woman is free until all women are free has scientific underpinnings¹⁷ and thus makes the task more urgent. For me in these days of post-feminism this finding was important as it gave credibility and urgency to the task I am suggesting. While I was able to show that some educationalists are creating interesting work in the spirituality of childhood I was also able to demonstrate its weakness in terms of theological underpinning. This is a trend that distresses me since I am convinced that spirituality is not a nebulous thing but is rooted in deep human and therefore political theological truths. By moving the conversation through the new cosmologies and into analysing energy fields in the light of Isherwood and Heyward's Christologies I was able to

¹⁷ Sheldrake, 1989, *op.cit.*, p.81-98.

bring together the political in the Christologies with the urgent need to not only empower the child but to engage with the planet which too is on the brink of disaster. Here too is something of the originality in combining the empowerment and flourishing of the child with that of the planet, ecofeminist theologians have placed women and nature together but perhaps not quite as I do in terms of these fields and dunamis. I have shown that this energy that both infuses and flows between us is a way forward to creative interconnectivity because we have a choice in how we impact on each other in relationship as fields within the unified field. It is there freely flowing to be received and freely to be given in abundance.

Key Findings

The thesis has demonstrated some new ways of approaching old theological problems and has shone light on new problems and also new possibilities. There have been a number of findings along the way as mentioned, but there appear to be three major findings which I will explain below.

1. Art as Language and Praxis

The art work that accompanies this body of work began its formation as a body theology long before I encountered any theological meaning in an academic sense. The whole intimate connection with my embodied way of painting began as an active resource for saying what I felt to keep myself, sane and well. This was how I lived my life in and through this creative process. So this lived process was based on action, reflection and action as a way of a living praxis, liberating me as I unfolded the layers of meaning from within. This took me on a more consciously enabled journey, affecting how I viewed and experienced the world, while my body continued its call to be heard. This personal way of researching opened me to a formal educative process that enriched knowledge of myself in relation to and in dialogue with others. This knowledge was further deepened, by meeting and connecting with feminist liberation theologians, through their work, which actually revealed the invisible, lost and mistreated feminine, within the patriarchal layers of dominance. This process of actively listening and hearing opened a window to a hidden landscape of women, thus enabling them to become present, visible and heard. These discourses and the process of 'hearing one another to speech' was for me a human/divine revelation. This focus on the lived experience of the reality of the human/divine, within the socio-political lives of women, resonated with my paintings. I recognised immediately the language that feminist theology was using, it related to my art and further to the way I painted, which was visceral and embedded deep in my body memories. I discovered that the way I painted was another way of mediating the knowledge

and meaning of the body and that this was another way of speaking powerful truths. It was at this point that I realised I was joining other contributors to feminist liberation theologies.

Paintings 1-7 reflect the Christology of personal transition from personal suffering to celebration which I was empowered to do through, what I now know as *dunamis* that Heyward locates within the body as a process of divine movement and becoming. This active innate power permeated the images that I painted with the energy and emotion of my experience that was calling to be heard. This for me was Christology in action and had the ability to heal me and as I have found, others in that process. I was a wounded healer amongst so many others within my newly found Christa community. The telling of the story in words is as important as the image, as is the breath that breathes those words into existence, looking through this lens I can see the interconnection of all three, image, word and breath.

When we listen to what others have to say about personal experience and their truths within the story, we are not only hearing words we are also hearing the breath of that experience, which breathes those words into being. Irigaray emphasises the importance of breath and breathing for women as a praxis for their own divinity.¹⁸ Looking at this in a wider context demonstrates *Ruach Elohim*, the breath of God that Isherwood and Long speak about, breath that moves across both time and space, in and between us through our work and as we speak our truths of experience through writing, painting, dancing or whatever creative practice we choose. Tessier's metaphor of the whirlwind meets the active process in my art work because it shows the transcendental phases of engaging visually, physically and psychologically with my experience, an experience I realised was shared by many as they engaged with my work.

The art works that have been painted specifically for this thesis were inspired by the new cosmology of theology/physics, philosophy and psychology. This is because they connect with what I am saying about the body and its interconnective reality with the cosmos throughout our evolutionary journey, whatever goes on inside us is also going on outside of us in the much wider, bigger picture of the universe. My art demonstrates this connective quality which is both personal, but also becomes collective¹⁹ when shared with an audience who have had similar experiences and so can relate to the story. This illustrates what Heyward means by the divine revelation of *dunamis*, co-creation and relationship.

The art work in the cosmic walk also holds this same co-creative potential for the child in an embodied way, because the message within the images, which have both a storytelling quality and are sensory and tactile, provoke a personal response from her about her part in

¹⁸ Luce Irigaray, 'A Breath That Touches in Words' in Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You: A Possible Felicity in History* Alison Martin (trans.) (London: Routledge, 1996), Ch.12, pp.121-28.

¹⁹ Heyward, 1982, *op.cit.*, p.44, and Linda Hartley, 2004, *op.cit.*, pp.67-70, also Adler, *ibid.*

this story. The universe story opens the way for co-creative activity for all of us, but from a Christian perspective this story must encompass all that is fully human for those who follow the central message of Christianity which is Jesus' human /divine incarnation.²⁰ The human/divine potential of the female child's sexual/spiritual unfolding then should be posited as a celebration point at the beginning of her story which is part of the bigger story of our cosmic beginnings and our becoming. This is because the bigger story has to incorporate all humanities stories whatever medium is chosen to relate them, since it takes many ways to express how we are all part of the diverse multiple unfolding of cosmic/human evolution. It is important then to realise that art as a methodology, has the potential to herald the female child's incarnational value, because of its ability to give voice to feelings and emotions of her world, the expression of which can be lost through language and the 'Word', within the world of childhood. Whether we are Christian or otherwise our humanity is being called to engage with the adventure story of the cosmos, being tactile and passionate is one way to open the door to that adventure.

When I engaged with Schüssler Fiorenza's work I realised the cyclical value of the first three principles of her hermeneutics of suspicion in my own lived experience, by first painting my experience in order to make visible what it was I felt and thought. Further, through this process of painting I was able to remember and proclaim an understanding of my child and reclaim her part in the story of my life process of becoming woman. The whole process of painting and the exhibiting of my art mirrored her fourth hermeneutic of creative actualisation which is both liturgical and celebratory. This revelatory moment furthered my understanding that my art had become an academic methodology in itself. My art had enabled me to reclaim my own legacy of power, as Judy Chicago calls it, which was on show for others to view and relate to. Of course my art work is the originality within this thesis as it is not based on any other works I have seen and reflect on the interdisciplinary work I am engaged in. However, understanding art as a methodology in itself is a further step of originality.

What co-creative praxis then can art as a methodology offer girlhoods? I have clearly indicated through my art the impact my body had experienced through not only sexual abuse but other assaults as a developing woman in which my initial experience played a large part in grooming me. I was fortunate to find and develop this way of expressing the physical impact that had affected me so deeply. My embodied experience became an indicator that echoed those past experiences. This indicator was like a radar that picked up behaviours of hegemonic masculinity that were under the guise of what was accepted under 'normal' social acceptable ideals that were more subtle in their form of dominance and control. This made me realise,

²⁰ John 1:1.

how dangerous to female children and women this normative level of acceptance is. The resonance, which I experienced both in Church and society, reminded me of that unwanted invasive action that had left me uninformed and at a loss as a child. I was an open vessel to be filled with anybody's projected desire and need that I had been habitually groomed for, until I was full and exploded those feelings and projections out into my art. It is the undoing and recreating of my embodied experience through my art in relation to my own empowerment that has the potential to transfer knowledge and self-awareness to others.

Art as a methodology can therefore be helpful to girls as a form of expressing what words cannot say about their embodied worlds within patriarchy. This is because image can be a powerful way for girls emotionally to speak their personal/political truth, which is an act in itself. Painting is a powerful medium because of the very nature of the embodied process, which could be understood as a spiralling incarnational activity. This process of painting is powerful because it gives space to acknowledge and locate within the embodied memory and feeling, which was made manifest through sensation. This process of remembering is one that unlocks memories from deep within the unconscious world, that, which is not yet known to the conscious body. Educative practices can be one of the triggers for realising and releasing the energy that entrap that which is not yet understood about any deep embodied experience. This energetic propulsion comes from something that is innate, the energy that sparks the impulse of life, *dunamis*, Heyward's erotic power of the divine. Girls in viewing female art work can through being witnesses to it, find a way into emotions and feelings that patriarchal society encourages them to repress.

The art I have created during the course of the thesis and the paintings that slightly pre-date the start of this work are born out of my personal experience placed in conversation with the theories I have engaged. What I have created through my art work and these conversations is another opening to move through in relation to the female divinity of the child showing that our bodies as female are so much more than they have been defined. In so doing I have created another platform and another liberating tool for the female child to be present, seen and heard.

I mentioned at the outset that feminist theology has been slow to create art work that speaks of its findings and so my body of work is a significant contribution to this discipline and I feel its rawness adds another dimension to what already exists in this area. The art contains on the one hand the representation of the theology of Swimme and Berry and on the other my embodied and imaginative engagement with the wider questions involved in the new cosmology as posed by Keller and others. As can be seen they also connect with the sexual theologies that I have explored and in so doing in my view represent the spiritual power of the

female child which is ready to be unleashed. Here is another aspect of the originality of my work in that it brings together all these aspects in artistic representation in a way that to my knowledge has not to date been attempted. I believe my work to be a language of female embodiment but it is also a praxis. The creation of it involved action, reflection and action both personally in the painting of the work and through the active viewing of my work by others and their reflections, in this way my work actually grows within the individual and the community.

2. The Paradox of Pain/Pleasure in the Sexual/Sensual life of the Female Child

A second issue that has been raised by my work is the confusing and pervasive entanglement of pain and pleasure and their impact on the sexual/sensual child. A good starting point would be to acknowledge that our sexual and sensual being are an intricately bound double act. Our sensuality is innate we are sensual beings from the time of our conception, this is what helps us, through movement and touch, in our development as a foetus into the newborn child that we all once were. Our sensual ability will inform the memory of who we are and where we have come from in the deepest cosmic sense. Hartley tells us that

Movement is in fact essential for the future physical, sensory, perception, psychological and mental development of the child. Through movement the fetus' nervous system develops, awareness of itself, and its environment begins to emerge, and a foundation for future learning and modes of interaction and response is established.²¹

Our sensual bodies are what inform our reality in the world, this is the beginning of our knowledge. She continues to tell us the deeper interconnective value of movement which,

is registered not only through the vestibular nerves of the inner ear, but also through proprioceptive and kinesthetic nerves located in the bones, joints, muscles, fascia and ligaments throughout the body, and through interoceptive nerves in the organs, glands, vessels, and nerves. Movement is also registered by each cell of the body. Information received from each of these sources about where the body is in relation to gravity, space and time...is vital to the consciousness of self and other and to the dance that can happen between them as this consciousness grows.²²

So even at this fundamental level everything is interconnected and because our sexuality is felt at a sensual level and is also connected to our emotional worlds, there is something in that connection that has a natural vulnerability. The openness of the child is obvious, because of a deep human need to survive. Socially constructed ideals name and define us in that moment of birth and this is the paradox that our sexual/sensual bodies have to make sense of and live within. We as adults do not always notice the impact that our ideals and actions have upon these young, diverse, lived in bodies, which so willingly and trustingly receive whatever comes

²¹ Hartley, 1995, *op.cit.*, p.27.

²² *op.cit.*, p.28.

their way. Gender and our sexual realities can be lost in this definitive moment whilst our sensual awareness continues to grow with whatever we are touched by or with. We need touch and stimulation to exist as human beings, sometimes we can be both knowingly and inadvertently betrayed by that touch and stimulation, or be damaged by the lack of it. The betrayal I am speaking about is not only about sexual abuse per se, children's bodies are touched in many other ways, both through the way they are spoken to or about and through physical action, bodies are also touched and infiltrated by the media and what it has to offer in its various forms. All of what we think and do filters through the body from our early development in the womb and has an even greater impact immediately as we enter the outer space of society and the world. The female child can easily lose touch or become afraid, deceived or alienated in who she is in her body because of the very nature of society's expectations of conformity to social norms. These social norms that become the status quo hold many dangers for sexual desire and its intimate connection with our sensual nature, doubly so for the female child.

Children come into the world with their own informed package that is already full of endless possibilities that are waiting to be unwrapped and nurtured to help them grow. This is what parents need to be aware of and are often not, because of their own experience in childhood and the upbringing they have had. I have also come to understand through my research that there is a type of adult voyeurism that seems to have developed as suggested by Margaret Durham within a *Lolita Effect* type framework that tightly correlates to the fashion world and body image which creates multiple problems ranging from eating disorders and corrective surgery to female body parts. This adds to a confusion that creates a self-perpetuating cycle and can distort the sexual/sensual nature of the child. A sexual sensuality which has the potential to be connected in a much more healthy way within the child, one that does not ask her to give herself away to a construction that has already defined her. I also realised that this was closely linked to consumerism, because of the tight hold it now has on our young people's attention and pocket money and definitions of themselves, as researchers Ed Mayo and Agnes Nairn inform us in their book *Consumer Kids*. Voyeurism and consumerism demonstrate the multi-layered, paradoxical complexities at work in the female children's sexual/sensual lives. Both have sensual pleasure for her, to be admired and have some power to consume are deeply pleasing to the growing child, but both are on others terms and not her own.

The biggest and most common idea we have about the child is its innocence, this assumption leaves the child wide open and vulnerable in a different way from the life giving vulnerability she has, as an open ended being in the uncertainty of the new cosmology. Kincaid

alerts us to the danger of eroticising the innocence of the child by thinking of her as an empty vessel to be poured into. The danger here of asexualising the child makes her more desirable and gives an open invitation for the adults desire to be projected onto/into her, rather than nurturing her already innate, grounded sexual/sensual nature on her own terms. He says,

If we posit openly that children are activated by sexual energy, the evasive screens necessary for eroticising them disappear; that is, it is necessary that they be innocent and pure if they are to be alluring and also give the adults the sentimental stories of denial and projection we find indispensable...The same goes for purity...another empty figure that allows the admirer to read just about anything into its vacancy. The constructions of modern woman and modern child are very largely evacuations, the ruthless distribution of eviction notices. Correspondingly, the instructions we receive on what to regard as sexually arousing tell us to look for (and create) this emptiness, to discover the erotic in that which is most susceptible to inscription, the blank page.²³

Whilst Kincaid recognises the abhorrence of child abuse, he says we have to recognise our part as the adults and how we maintain the romantic notions of childhood innocence and purity in our storytelling when we hear these stories of abuse of the poor innocent, pure child. Kincaid proposes that we have grown these ideas of innocence and purity from the romantic period over two hundred years ago, when the romantic poets used these metaphors for the child in their poetry, which he says do not give the child a chance when bombarded with these notions. I think what he says holds truth, however I would situate the problem further back in time, with the Church Fathers and their notions of innocence and purity which was to be mastered and attained for adults so as to be fit for the Kingdom of Heaven. This image of innocence and purity denies autonomy and is part of the damage done to the growing child.

The paintings in Figure 1, at the beginning of the introduction and Figure 58, at the end of section three, demonstrate the physical and emotional realisation, of an experience I had lived with for at least thirty years. This image is looking back as an adult to the child, where I was able to locate and make sense of that experience through painting the feelings of my child's sexual/sensual emotional world. The image shows an orgasmic reality that is situated within adult male coercion that bought for me the experience of pleasure and pain, that was both physical and emotional, compounded with the adults insistence that this was to be a secret. This was without doubt an abusive situation first and foremost because of the unequal power relation between adult and child. This is just one layer that held the beginning of a multilayered experience for me as a female child, because the power play on the word 'secret' became the key that locked the door on my sexual, emotional world. The pleasure, the pain and the secret created complexity in my contained world, which was squashed up in the small

²³ Kincaid, *op.cit.*, p.16.

space of my body and I was not able to release it. This complexity came with me into the adult world of relationship and motherhood and left me very ill informed. My childhood abuse coupled with Christian censure in the area of embodiment and pleasure simply compounded my confusion and disconnection from any autonomous sensuality. It was during a six year period of chosen celibacy as an adult that I discovered the sexual/spiritual connection for myself. It was here that I discovered a delightful internal world of sensation that was not sparked by the touch of another human, although I cannot say that the community I found myself in did not influence my experience, since my research has shown that I was part of an energetic field of a worshipping community, a morphogenic field.²⁴ This experience would not only motivate my art, but also my worship and prayer life. I really enjoyed this newly embodied way of living and it gave me physical pleasure, but as with all paradoxes even within a communal space there was dis-ease and pain. These paradoxes are at work in the child's sexual/sensual reality and are integral to her overall spiritual development. Children do enjoy their own sexual pleasure²⁵ and this is informed by their sensual world, which needs to be nurtured so it remains embedded in their own growing embodied integrity, to guard against manipulation by others and even the media. Sexual abuse in childhood can disrupt the sensory world of the child, making her vulnerable to manipulation by predatory adults and other sources of sensory bombardment that may betray her sensual/ sexual world, in her ongoing experience into adulthood. Some female children who experience sexual pleasure within this sexually abusive scenario can find some way of sustaining themselves creatively, if it is made available within their environment. Other childhoods can be disrupted to the extent that recovery from this seemingly sensory disaster is impossible. This is because of our prescribed way of dealing with these situations within western society and Church and the polarised notions of who is good or bad and fear of the female sexual/sensual body because of its historical denigration. What these children may need is a recognition of their sensual/sexuality with no fear in that from adults around them and a naming of their paradoxical experiences to date. This coupled with a nurturing of positive sensuality in the child's body which may prove difficult for traditional theology, could be a basis for recovery. I am placing the female child's body in the cosmos, a space that is without moral judgement. This space holds the potential for recovery from her sexual abusive history and also where she may discover the diverse possibilities of her future female becoming. This is an open ended space, one of cosmic paradox. This is not an eschatology of perfection, but a space full of sensuous invitations

²⁴ Sheldrake, 2009, *op.cit.*, pp. 65-80.

²⁵ Barnaby B. Barat, *The Emergence of Somatic Psychology and Body-Mind Therapy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p.154.

within the quantum field which is energetically charged. A theological space where dynamis has, through its evolutionary journey, found its home in us.

3. Locating Childhood in the Theological Cosmology of Women

My research began focussed on the female child and it is important for me that my findings remain focussed primarily on the female child. This is because as we have seen children are absent in even the most radical sexual theology and are contained and even 'made up' in spirituality discourses. However, it is of course possible to place the female child in an embodied way, at the beginning of the process of her becoming woman, one that is an open ended model of infinite possibilities, not in the tight definitive model that has kept women hostage to male dominance. Feminist liberation theologies have for forty years, been highlighting this play on power that robs women of their co-creative potential as equal participators in godding the earth. We have heard that the female body has been dismissed by Christian doctrine as not quite perfect enough. Her menstruating body has been considered dirty because of the deeply embedded purity laws that have filtered down through the ages, and her body has been viewed as dark, mysterious and chaotic none of which sits well with traditional theology. These ideas remain embedded in much Church thinking and have kept women in a place of subjugation. The idea of women as the seductress and the devil's gateway along with other denigrating accusations, still hover around the in hegemonic masculine thinking. The female body has not been honoured from her own ground of being for thousands of years and for the last two millennia of Christianity she has been made invisible within biblical text. The new cosmology offers the possibility to look deeper into the body and into the universe to make connections that look far beyond what our historical Christian theological understanding has told us. Keller takes us poetically back into the chaos and the void, as a place of creative theology, that needs to be reclaimed not only for women, but more importantly now for the female child. This is because chaos for a long time has been kept in the deep dark mysterious space of the feminine, to be replaced two millennia ago by the order of patriarchy within Christianity. Science has only just begun, within the last decade, to acknowledge the importance of chaos that they now realise still dances within the dark realm of both energy and matter that brought all that is in the cosmos to birth. There are theological works and scientific works that suggest chaos is primarily a feminine concept. So far Keller is the only one to have theologically located the feminine face of the deep in such an explicit way, this has opened our eyes to the reality of a creation story of multiple birthed beginnings by the feminine, thus changing the face of God. This is extremely relevant for our female children not only because it changes the legacy but gives an opportunity to ground the female child in her own divine roots, this grounding is essential if she is not to be swallowed up

completely by the roaring lion of the market place, which, will continue its sensual bombardment on her, with messages of real womanhood. The Church and society need to embrace the embodiment of various embodiments of femaleness for our children in the light of Keller's proposal that incorporates a more widely diverse scope of becoming woman, which is in keeping with the ongoing cosmic narrative. Although I still maintain that this body of work needs to remain as a platform for the female child as it set out to do, it is also true that this methodology can be used for women, to heal her inner child and meet her in this damaged spaces enabling her to grasp the abundant life promised in the Christian story.

Keller's theomic theology, one that begins in the deep, dark chaos of creativity, gives women a positive outlook as a starting point against the negative backdrop that Christian theological history has given her. She is not the fallen daughter of Eve but rather the glorious outpouring of a dynamic cosmic process. Nevertheless, because primarily our development process starts in childhood, the new cosmology must begin with the child if we are to attempt to avoid the many assaults on female being-ness the world throws at the female child.

This thesis is by no means the end of the work but rather has begun the process of developing this relatively young field. Its findings are of course like any other body of work dependent on its methodology and the resources used. However I believe I have demonstrated that it is a valid and original step along what remains a very long road for the female child.

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